

A  
COTTAGE ROSE  
MABEL QUILLER-COUCH



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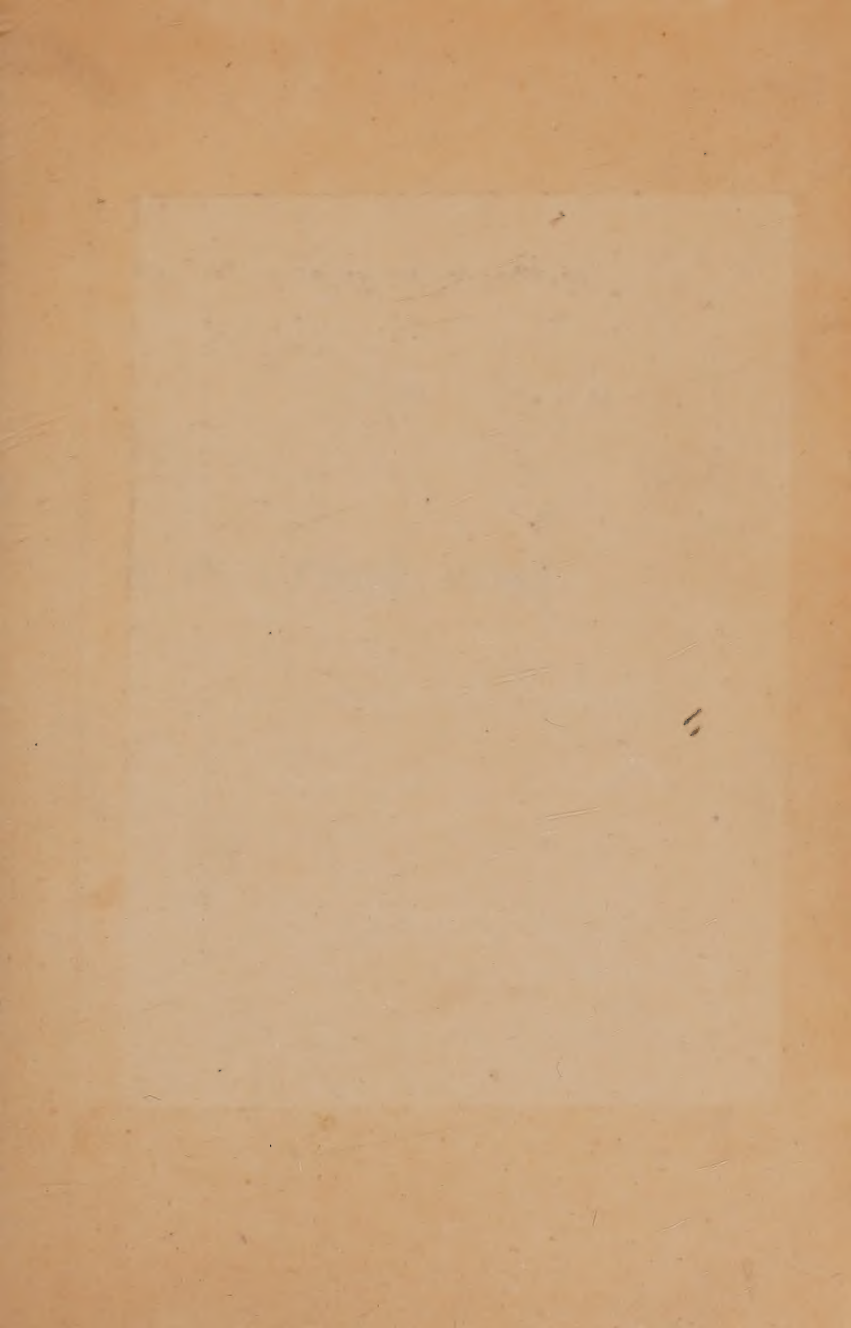
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A COTTAGE ROSE

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Illustrated in Colour by A. A.  
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"OH, GRANNY," SHE CRIED, "IT IS A ROSE-BUSH!"

[Page 169]

Fr.



# A COTTAGE ROSE

BY  
MABEL QUILLER-COUCH

AUTHOR OF  
"THE CARROLL GIRLS" "A PAIR OF REDFOLLS"  
"A WAIF AND A WELCOME" "ANXIOUS AUDREY" ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY  
PERCY TARRANT



GEORGE G. HARRAP & CO. LTD.  
LONDON      CALCUTTA      SYDNEY

*First published August 1920*  
by GEORGE G. HARRAP & CO. LTD.  
39-41 Parker Street, Kingsway, London, W.C.2  
*Reprinted: February 1923; August 1924*

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*Printed in Great Britain by Jarrold & Sons, Ltd., Norwich*

TO ESTHER





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# A COTTAGE ROSE

## CHAPTER I

### DULL DAYS AT LABURNUM COTTAGE

Plant patience in the garden of thy soul :  
The roots are little, but the fruits are sweet.

**W**HEN the weather was very fine and settled, and the sun not too hot, and the grass quite dry, Dorothea and her aunt sometimes took their needlework into the garden, and spent the whole afternoon there.

To Dorothea these breaks in the sameness of her dull days were full of pure delight. When in the garden she did not get the 'fidgets' nearly so badly as she did in the prim, hateful parlour, where, seated on two stiff upright chairs, she and her aunt, Miss Julia Garland, sat in dreamy silence from two o'clock until four every afternoon of their lives, stitching or knitting—except on Sundays, of course—garments which were, so Dorothea thought, as ugly as garments could possibly be.

The silence was so deep that if Dorothea made the least noise with her thimble her aunt

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never failed to hear it, and, with an impatient click of her tongue, would exclaim crossly, "Dorothea, *how* many times do you need to be told that it is extremely vulgar to make a noise with your thimble when sewing? It is the sign, too, of a bad worker. Please don't let me have to tell you of it again."

And Dorothea, who had never wanted her aunt to tell her at all, would try harder than ever not to make the least little sound, but wondered the while why it was vulgar to click one's thimble but not vulgar to click one's tongue.

The 'fidgets,' too—how they did torment her! The chair was so high and wide, and uncomfortable. Try as hard as she would, she could not make her toes reach the ground, and she had nothing to lean against. After she had been sewing for a little while her back ached so badly she scarcely knew how to bear it. If her feet could have rested on a footstool, or her back against the chair, no matter how hard, it would have been a relief; but this was not allowed, and though she stretched herself every day and night, it seemed to her that her legs never did grow longer, and never would do so.

At one time she had thought of tying her feet to the foot of the bed every night, to stretch her legs, but she knew that Aunt Julia

## Dull Days at Laburnum Cottage

would be certain to find her out sooner or later, and it was better to be short and have the fidgets, than have Aunt Julia think one vain and foolish. Aunt Julia could not endure vain people. She said dreadfully severe things about them.

In the garden there was so much to see and hear. There were the birds and the butterflies, the clouds and the trees and flowers, and there was the sweet scent of the flowers, too, in place of the musty smell of the dreary parlour.

Dorothea did so dislike the parlour. It always made her think of a prison, and though they sat there nearly every afternoon, and in the evenings too on Sundays, it never looked or felt like a real lived-in, 'homey' room, but was as uncomfortable as it was ugly. For one thing, Miss Garland would never allow a flower to be brought into the house, which was a great trial to Dorothea, who loved flowers passionately, and would have filled every corner with them could she have had her own way. Indeed, she always lived in fear that they would be banished from the garden too, for their fallen petals littered the paths and beds, and if there was one thing that Miss Garland disliked more than another it was litter.

To nervous, anxious little Dorothea it really seemed sometimes as though the flowers made the garden as untidy as they possibly could,

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on purpose to aggravate Aunt Julia. But though they caused her much anxiety on this account, they brought her much pleasure as well, for now and then she would be sent out, with a large black cotton overall covering her frock, and a basket in her hand, to pick up the fallen leaves and petals, and these were 'white stone' days in her joyless life. The pleasure of them never faded from her mind.

While she was gathering up the petals she would get as close as possible to the rose or syringa bush, and draw in deep breaths of their sweetness. She invented all kinds of games too, and though she had to keep them to herself and play them in imagination only, she enjoyed them none the less for that. Sometimes she pretended she was a bird, and had her home in the bush; sometimes she was a fairy, by means of a spell disguised as a little girl, and never to be released from the spell until she had picked up every petal in the garden. But as Aunt Julia always called her in before she had accomplished even a quarter of her task, the spell was never likely to be broken, unless she could find other fairies to help her.

Once she grew very daring. She found two yellow-shelled snails under a bush, and actually managed to take them up to her room without being discovered, and there for two whole days she kept them in a box, and fed them and talked



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to them—but on the third day she found the box deserted. Her pets had gone for ever. How and where they went she never knew, and she had not the courage to ask, but with a heart full of anxiety she hoped that they had got out at the window, and down to the garden again by way of the rose-bush which grew over the front of the house and all round her bedroom window. For if they were hiding in her room Aunt Julia would surely find them, and Dorothea shuddered when she thought what the end of their story might be.

She never had another pet while she lived at Laburnum Cottage, so she lavished her love on the birds and the butterflies which flew about the garden. She loved the birds best, and next to them the butterflies, for the birds had so much sense, and were so friendly. The butterflies were not such good company, but they thrilled her with their fearlessness, as they flitted about Aunt Julia's garden, alighting where and when they chose. The birds would fly away in alarm when Miss Garland waved her arms and her handkerchief at them, but the butterflies paid no heed whatever. They would even fly close by her very nose, or hover over her head as though she were a flower or a blossoming bush.

They were so gay, too. They seemed to have neither a care nor a worry in the world, and

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nothing to do but be happy and enjoy the sun and the breeze and the flowers. To Dorothea it seemed a great pity that they could not sing; they would have had such sweet little voices, she felt sure, and such pretty songs. She often amused herself by thinking of the different voices the different kinds would have: the 'Red Admiral' deep and solemn, the 'Peacock' all trills and flourishes, while the white ones which flew about in such numbers, like pretty spirit butterflies, would have soft, pathetic voices, she was sure. She did wish, though, that she had some one to talk it over with—some one who would not laugh at her, and think her silly.

It would have been of no use to mention the subject to Aunt Julia, for she would only grow cross and declare that Dorothea was wasting her time, and, as likely as not, she would set her a page of history to learn by heart, because she needed something to occupy her mind.

Dorothea hated history because no one had ever tried to make it interesting to her. When she was five years old Miss Garland had one day turned out a lot of her own old school-books, and every morning since she had set Dorothea to learn a page of one or the other by heart. One day it would be history, another day geography, then came grammar, then general knowledge, then Roman history. On Saturdays

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she had sums to do, and on Sundays she learnt a Psalm or some verses, and a hymn. But nothing was ever explained to her, consequently nothing was real to her, or of any interest.

Dorothea hated all her lessons, and wondered how it would ever matter to her, living in dull, sleepy Blybury, whether England was an island or a continent, or whether King John or King Henry went to war with France or any other country. She did not know who or what any of them were, and she did not particularly want to know. If she had wanted to know it would have been all the same, for one of Miss Garland's strictest rules was that no questions must be asked; and until one lives where one may never ask a question, it is impossible to realize how very difficult and dull life can be.

Dorothea very nearly learnt to keep her thoughts to herself, and to answer her own questions as best she could, but on this particular day she broke through her usual silence, for while she was busily knitting away at a sock for the 'Waifs and Strays' a large white butterfly actually settled on the little iron table close beside her, and stood there fluttering its wings, and looking at her knowingly with its tiny black eyes—at least Dorothea felt sure it was looking at her, and smiled back encouragingly.

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"Oh, Aunt Julia!" she cried, carried away by her delight. "Oh, Aunt Julia! do please look, or you will miss something very wonderful! Here's the most beautiful butterfly you ever saw, and he is so tame! I do believe he knows us!"

Miss Garland looked up sharply and waved the butterfly away. "Don't be foolish, Dorothea," she said scornfully; "as though a butterfly can be tame! You are old enough to know better. It is only a 'cabbage' too, as I think you might have known by this time, and there is nothing beautiful about them; they are as common as common can be."

Dorothea had often wondered how she was to know things if she was never told, for she might not ask questions, but to-day she was so interested and so curious she forgot everything else.

"A—a 'cabbage'!" she exclaimed in blank astonishment. A cabbage was to her just the horrid green vegetable that they had, nine days out of ten, for dinner. "How can it be a cabbage, Aunt Julia?"

"I mean a cabbage butterfly," Miss Garland answered impatiently. "Surely you have seen enough of those to know what they are! It's the commonest kind there is."

"They are the prettiest and nicest," thought

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Dorothea, "even if they do grow out of cabbages, and the friendliest and cleverest too. They aren't nearly as conceited as most butterflies are, I'm sure."

For a few moments she was silent. She was, as usual, asking questions of herself, and, as usual, failing to find any satisfactory answers. This time, though, she so badly wanted to have them answered that she forgot some of her awe, and addressed her aunt again.

"Aunt Julia," she said earnestly, "it doesn't matter, does it, what we come from, if we are beautiful afterward? I mean"—she hesitated, finding it hard to explain—"I mean—it wouldn't matter about a butterfly's coming from a cabbage, would it, if it was beautiful when it grew up? Wouldn't it be just as good as if it came from a rose?"

Miss Garland found Dorothea's questions quite uninteresting, as well as puzzling to answer, and this annoyed her.

"It is a pity that you can't find something sensible to think about," she exclaimed crossly, "instead of filling your head with rubbish about butterflies. I haven't time to waste on such nonsense. I know this much, though—and you had better learn to know it too—that no good comes of trying to be what you ain't, nor of trying to climb up to a position that's above you. For my part"—bitterly—"I'd be



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ashamed to try and worm myself into a higher one than I was born in—only to be looked down upon by those that are there already. I—I'd have more pride and self-respect."

Dorothea did not understand all that her aunt was saying, but she felt that some reply was necessary, so she answered gravely: "Yes, Aunt Julia, I should think that would be dreadful." She never could understand her aunt when she talked in that fashion—which she did very often—but she always had a feeling that the remarks were levelled at her, or some one belonging to her, and she felt troubled, without knowing why. She often wished that her aunt would say more, so that she might know what she did mean.

To-day she even ventured to ask her a question: "Do you think birds and butterflies are like that, Aunt Julia? Do you think 'cabbage' butterflies wish they were 'Red Admirals'? It seems silly of them if they do, for the cabbages are really prettier than any. Don't you think so?"

Miss Julia clicked her tongue impatiently. "Dorothea, will you try to think sense, and talk sense! But, if you can't talk anything but nonsense, I must ask you not to talk at all. As though butterflies ever want anything but warmth and room to fly about and show off in! They've no brains!"

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"I only wondered if the plain ones ever wanted to be beautiful!" persisted Dorothea, who had an intense sympathy with plain people, and plain creatures, and every one and everything that other folk looked down upon.

"Beautiful is that beautiful does," interrupted Miss Garland sharply. "No one is beautiful who doesn't act beautifully."

"And if people do act beautifully, do they become beautiful, Aunt Julia?" Dorothea inquired eagerly, too anxious for the information to mind the scolding which was almost sure to follow.

"If you don't stop asking questions this minute, you will drive me indoors, and I shall drive you to bed. Haven't you sense enough to know that if anything could alter the face the Lord gave us, we should all have been handsome before this? If you are homely-looking, you will live homely and die homely. And if I have to speak to you again, we will go indoors, and that's the end of it!"

Alas for poor Dorothea's dreams! She did so long for beauty, and to learn that however hard she tried to gain it she would never succeed was a great blow. "I wish I'd been born a caterpillar," she thought, "then I should have turned into a butterfly without any trying, and I could have flown right away from here, and have gone where I liked, and Aunt



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Julia shouldn't have caught me, no, not even if I had pitched on the table beside her. If she tried to, I'd just fly up and up and then right away—and I would never come back any more." And she pictured herself fluttering from place to place, from wild rose to honeysuckle, from clove pink to meadow-sweet, through lanes and over hedges until she reached the cliffs by the sea. She had even begun to picture herself flitting across the sea itself, when Aunt Julia's voice brought her suddenly back to reality, and the little shut-in garden.

"None of our family was ever beautiful," she was saying.

Dorothea knew that. She had often looked through the photograph albums in the parlour, and dull work she had found it. There was not a pleasant or kindly face among them. If some of them had but smiled into the camera, or even ruffled their plastered down hair a little, it would have been a relief, and Dorothea would have felt that she could love them. But no Garland, or Baxter, had ever demeaned himself to do either.

"None of our family was ever beautiful," repeated Miss Garland, and she seemed to find pleasure in the fact. She felt that, at any rate, she was not the plainest member of it. "And I don't know that they were ever the

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worse for that, or craved to be other than they were. We've always been respected."

Dorothea looked at her aunt gravely. She was wondering if she, Dorothea, must be counted as one of the plain Garland family. She hoped not. Somehow she never felt herself to be one of them; but, of course, she could not say so to her aunt.

"Was Mother plain, Aunt Julia?" she asked abruptly. She had always longed to ask questions about her mother, whose name was never mentioned, and whose photograph was not in any of the albums, but she never had the courage. Now, in her nervousness, she blurted out the question in a way that would have shocked her at any other time.

Miss Julia turned first red, and then very white. "Your mother was no Garland," she said icily.

"Is that why her likeness isn't in the albums?" asked Dorothea breathlessly.

Miss Garland hesitated for a moment. "Yes," she answered curtly. "And I forbid you, Dorothea, to mention the subject again."

"It is as if Mother was too naughty to be spoken about, naughtier even than I am," Dorothea thought to herself, and her heart swelled with pain and anger, while tears, bitter, miserable tears, welled up in her eyes. Many a night her pillow had been wet when she fell

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asleep ; to-day the tears, brimming over, fell on to the sock she was knitting, and her little trembling fingers knitted them in with the coarse yarn. " I think," she thought pathetically, as she tried to see her work through her tears—" I think that if the missionary man who is going to have these could know how miserable I am, he would come to Blybury and take me away. I am sure it must be nicer to be with savages than with Aunt Julia !" No words, though, passed her lips. The look on her aunt's face daunted all spirit in her. She knew that she had offended deeply this time. She never could decide which she shrank from most : the cutting words which any mention of her mother drew forth, or the dreadful angry silence which followed.

Silence fell between them—silence broken only by the nervous, hurried click of Miss Garland's needles, and the joyous song of the birds. But the sun shone, the birds sang, the soft breeze just ruffled the leaves, and Dorothea's curls, and the wool she was using ; butterflies flitted around them as fearless and gay as though that little scene had never taken place ; and after a while the peace and beauty entered into Dorothea's heart again. Her eyes, free once more from tears, rested fondly first on the great chestnut trees which closed in the garden at the far end. then on the swinging

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golden tassels of the laburnum, and thence wandered to the cloud-flecked sky above her; and her thoughts followed her eyes.

Both were still in the clouds when Miss Garland, looking up suddenly, caught Dorothea with her hands lying idle in her lap.

"Knit eight rows plain, then baste one on either side of the seam stitch," rapped out Aunt Julia sharply, and Dorothea's eyes came back with painful swiftness from the blue sky to the clerical grey sock in her hand. "Don't forget the seam stitch, Dorothea, or you will have to rip it all out again."

"If Aunt Julia had the loveliest news in the world to tell, she would tell it as if she were scolding," thought Aunt Julia's disrespectful niece. "If she came to tell me that my Fairy Godmother had brought me a golden carriage and a pair of the loveliest little ponies ever seen, and a chain of diamonds, she would make them seem only a worry. 'Dorothea,' she would say, 'some person has sent you a carriage and two horses, and what good they will be to you is more than anyone in their senses can say; and if she thinks I am going to keep the thing clean and feed the horses, you can tell her at once that I haven't the time, nor the strength, nor the means. What she could have been thinking of, to go wasting money on such nonsense, is more than any

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sane person can say ; but there, I've long since given up expecting sense in anyone ! ' ' "

In her thoughts Dorothea mimicked Aunt Julia's words and manners so perfectly that she could not help feeling guilty. It seemed to her that her aunt must know what was passing in her mind, and she glanced apprehensively across at her ; but to her great relief she saw that, though Miss Julia looked more severe than usual, her mind was given to counting her own stitches.

Her fears allayed, Dorothea's thoughts went wandering again, and the next thing her eyes rested on was a robin hopping about on the grass, chirping to her, and winking pertly at her with his beady black eyes.

" Oh, Aunt Julia ! " she cried impulsively, filled with the never-failing hope of sympathy which nothing seemed to kill—" Oh, Aunt Julia, do please look at that darling robin ! Do you think he will come and perch on me, if I keep very, very still ? "

" I don't see the use of it if he does," retorted Miss Garland, without even raising her eyes ; " and how you can keep quite still and go on with your work too is more than I can fathom. I wish the robin would go and eat some of the ants over there in the grass, instead of wasting his time standing about doing nothing but make a noise."



## Dull Days at Laburnum Cottage

For once Dorothea's wishes were the same as Miss Julia's; she had a horror of ants, and longed now to draw up her feet and sit upon them. But a pretty sulphur butterfly flew past her and made her forget the ants; then came a gorgeous fellow, all red and brown and blue, and settled on a bush close by. Dorothea regarded him scornfully. "Go away, you showy old Red Admiral," she murmured under her breath. "You do look vulgar with all those gaudy colours. You haven't nearly as good taste as the dear, dainty white 'cabbages.'"

"Aunt Julia," she said aloud, "I suppose if ugly people are always ugly, beautiful ones are always beautiful, even if they don't do good things."

Miss Garland gave another of those sharp little clicks of her tongue which always meant impatience. "I don't know, I am sure," she answered shortly. "Nobody could be beautiful in my eyes if he didn't act so. Your work won't be beautiful either if you don't stop chattering and attend to it," she added. "Now I am going in to put on the kettle for tea." But in rising she dropped her knitting basket, and the wools flew all over the grass.

"Nothing could make that beautiful," thought Dorothea scornfully, as she picked up the last ball; "but I s'pose somebody will



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be glad of it; and p'r'aps there is somebody somewhere who could love Aunt Julia. I wonder if there is anybody anywhere who would love me! Oh, I wish there was, and, oh, I wish—I wish they would come and take me away! I am so tired of being scolded, and of never doing anything right, and of being in the way, and—and, oh! why does Aunt Julia dislike me so, and why won't she tell me about Father and Mother, and why does she always speak as though they were wicked, and mustn't be talked about? I am sure Mother was good, and nice, and pretty, even if she was Aunt Julia's sister, and, oh, I wish she hadn't died and left me!" And, quite against all rules, Dorothea lay down on the grass, and the tears, no longer to be held in check, rolled down her cheeks in hot, heavy drops. "Oh, Mother, why did you go away! Why did you send me to Aunt Julia! She doesn't want me, she doesn't like me. I—I think she hates me, and——"

"Sweet! sweet!" said a cheerful little voice, and the robin came hopping over the grass toward Dorothea. When he had come almost close, he stood and gazed at her with friendly, twinkling eyes. "Sweet, sweet," he said again, very sympathetically, or so it seemed to Dorothea.

"Oh, Mr Robin, I am so mis'erable," she sobbed.

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"Sweet!" said the robin consolingly.

"No, I am not a bit sweet," said Dorothea; but she had to laugh, for the robin, as though alarmed at her statement, turned and hopped away as fast as he could go. "I will be sweet to you, though, if you will stay," she called after him, but he only ran the faster; and Dorothea moved almost as fast as he, for suddenly she heard Miss Garland's footsteps approaching.

## CHAPTER II

### A VISIT FROM UNCLE TOM

. . . Who best  
Bear His mild yoke, they serve Him best.—MILTON

**I** WONDER why very plain people are called homely ? ” mused Dorothea. “ Those I’ve seen aren’t the very least little bit like home. I am quite sure I shouldn’t like to have a home with them ! ”

When she talked to herself Dorothea did not bother at all about grammar. She could think more easily without it, and she understood what she meant, which was, after all, the main point—or so she thought in those days.

“ I think homely people should be homey. I mean nice, and kind, and good-tempered, not ugly and grumbly like Aunt Julia’s relations.” Dorothea never counted her aunt’s relations as hers too ; they were so different in every way that they counted as not belonging to her at all.

It was Uncle Tom Baxter who had set her thoughts working in this groove. Uncle Tom Baxter had called, and was now in the kitchen

## A Visit from Uncle Tom

with Aunt Julia, and Dorothea was left to go on with the dusting alone. Uncle Tom had taken no notice of Dorothea when he came in, and had only just said "Good morning" very gruffly to Aunt Julia. Neither had shown the least pleasure in meeting. They did not feel any, and it was not in the nature of either to pretend. Uncle Tom had said "G'morning," and Aunt Julia had said, "You are very early this morning, Tom"—had said it, too, in a voice which Dorothea, at any rate, had understood. Miss Garland hated to be interrupted in her work, and they were in the midst of giving the parlour its weekly turn-out when they saw Mr Baxter coming up the path.

He was coming slowly, almost reluctantly, it seemed, so Aunt Julia had had time to unpin her skirts and take off the duster which she had pinned over her hair. She took off, too, one of her dusting gloves in order to shake hands with her visitor, but she put it on again almost at once, as a hint to him that she had no time to spare.

Uncle Baxter had taken no notice whatever of Dorothea, but she knew that he was aware of her being in the room, for he said to Miss Garland in his gruff, unpleasant voice: "Can't I speak to you alone, Julia?"

Dorothea knew that what he meant was, "Can't that child be sent away?" and put

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down her duster, expecting to be told to go to her own room and stay there until she was called. But to her surprise Miss Garland said to her cousin: "Step into the kitchen, Tom." Then, turning to Dorothea, she added: "Go on with your dusting just as though I were here. The chairs and tables will take you till I come back—if you do them properly." And Dorothea, filled with shame and resentment at being so spoken to before a visitor, and especially one of the fault-finding relations, had picked up her duster again, and started to rub the very chair on which Uncle Baxter had leaned and left great dull finger-marks on the polished wood. "Aunt Julia always says something like that before people," she thought resentfully, "just as though she can't trust me while her back is turned; but she knows that she can."

To make it quite clear that she could, Dorothea rubbed the chairs and tables even more thoroughly than usual, and went over them a second time—but still Miss Garland did not return.

"I had better dust the albums next," she thought; "Aunt Julia would tell me to if she was here. Oh, dear! won't she be cross at being hindered so long!"

The albums, which, ever since her tenth birthday, she had been trusted to dust, stood

## A Visit from Uncle Tom

on the lower shelf of the little bookcase ; there were two large ones and a small one, and once a week Dorothea was expected to pass her duster over every page of each, so she had plenty of opportunity for studying all the Baxter and Garland relatives, from their cradles to their graves, and all the different degrees of grim ' homeliness ' they presented at various stages of their careers. Even as babies they had been dull and unattractive, thought Dorothea, as she passed her duster over the stolid, sullen faces which gazed out at her. " Aunt Julia is the best of them all. I think she must have been rather pretty when she was a little girl."

Below each photograph there was written, in fine spidery handwriting, the name of the original, date of birth, the married name—if the original had married—and the date of death, if he or she had died. Dorothea loved to linger over these records, trying to piece together the family history, about which Miss Garland rarely condescended to speak.

Uncle Tom Baxter's father and Aunt Julia's mother were brother and sister ; she had learned that much. " Your grandmother was a Baxter," Miss Julia had proudly said ; but who the Baxters were, or whence their claim to pride, Dorothea could never make out. She supposed one of them must have written the



## A Cottage Rose

book called *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*, which Aunt Julia read on Christmas Days, after the dinner was finished and cleared away, but which lay on a mat on the parlour table all the rest of the year.

One day Dorothea had asked timidly, "Did great-grandfather write that book, Aunt Julia?" but Aunt Julia had only said, "Don't ask nonsensical questions, Dorothea! Your great-grandfather worked hard all his days; he never had any time to waste in writing books and things." All the same, Miss Garland kept the volume in a prominent position in the room, and felt a secret pride in the name upon the cover.

To-day, however, Dorothea was not thinking of great-grandfather Baxter, dead and buried long since under a heavy granite slab in the churchyard on the hill, but of Uncle Tom Baxter, alive, and shut in the kitchen with Aunt Julia, and she grew so impatient with him for delaying the morning's work and making Aunt Julia cross, that she took a pleasure in dabbing at his photograph with her duster, and rubbing it hard.

"I wonder what he can be talking about," she thought for the tenth time; and then, at last, the kitchen door was opened a little, and through the opening she heard her uncle's loud, rough voice.

## A Visit from Uncle Tom

"Well, sleep on it, Julia," he was saying. "Don't you hurry; think it well over. They can wait. Of course, they've got the law on their side; they've the right to see her, but it's for you to say when, and how, and for how long. You have had all the trouble and expense for six years and more, and so I'd tell them, and pretty plain too, if I were you. They ought to have written to you about it, not to me. As I said to 'Becca, 'A lady would have.' I s'pose they wanted to make strife 'twixt you and me."

Miss Garland's face had been white, but it turned whiter at her cousin's words. She knew why her cousin had been written to, instead of herself; she remembered the letters which had come to her again and again, letters with a crest on the envelope, which had gone, crest and all, into the fire unopened. She had not mentioned their coming at the time, and she did not now; for one thing, she felt too much ashamed, and, for another, she was feeling too ill to wish to detain him another second.

She had been worsted. She had thought she could defy fate and manage the destiny of others as she willed; and now she was being humbled, and shown that she could do no such thing. She had worked her will for a time by crooked ways, and now those who had taken the straight way were likely to triumph. The

## A Cottage Rose

colour flamed hotly over her white face at the thought that she, Julia Garland, had done a dishonourable thing, and would be found out—she who had always held her head so high, and been so severe on those who had fallen before temptation.

It was with infinite relief that she heard the door close on her cousin, and then, instead of going to the parlour to continue her work, she went back to the kitchen and shut herself in.

Dorothea sat, a little huddled heap, on the floor, the open album before her. Uncle Baxter's words had reached her clearly. The meaning of them was beyond her, but, somehow, she could not help the feeling that they referred to herself.

"You have had all the trouble and expense for six years and more"—she had come to Aunt Julia when she was four years old, and now she was more than ten. She knew she was, for one day not very long ago Aunt Julia had said to her: "You are a dreadful dunce for a great girl more than ten years old." And Dorothea had said, "Am I ten years old, Aunt Julia?" and Miss Garland had answered: "Why, yes, and a month and more added to that."

So she had been with Aunt Julia more than six years, and during all that time she had never heard herself mentioned but as a trouble ;

## A Visit from Uncle Tom

and when any of the family spoke to Aunt Julia in that particular tone of pity for all that she had to bear, Dorothea knew quite well that they were referring to herself.

But what this new worry was, and why Aunt Julia had shut herself up in the kitchen, was more than she could fathom. Yet the old feeling of shame and misery came pouring over her. "Why, oh why, was she always considered a trouble to everyone? Why did no one like her, or want her, or speak kindly to her? She did so long to be liked, to feel that someone was glad she had been born. Her heart ached with the pain of it all; hot tears welled up in her eyes and fell over. She wiped them away with her duster, but not before one had fallen plump on Uncle Baxter's photograph. Through the little drop his features looked changed and strange to Dorothea. "I wonder if anyone ever made you cry, you nasty old man, you!" she cried as she dabbed at his face, too, with the duster. "I believe you haven't any tears, or any heart in you, or if you have they must be stone ones!"

Miss Julia, when at last she appeared again, looked as though she, at any rate, had found tears, though the search had been a long one. At sight of her pale face and reddened eyelids Dorothea, in a burst of sympathy, sprang to her feet to run to her. She felt so very sorry for

## A Cottage Rose

anyone who was unhappy. But Miss Garland's voice and manner checked her before she had taken two steps.

"What were you doing, Dorothea, that you jumped up so guiltily when I came into the room? Have you broken anything?"

"No," said Dorothea shortly. "I've been dusting all—nearly all the time; I only jumped up because——"

"Well? Because of what?"

"Because I—I thought"—Dorothea grew fiery red with embarrassment and mortification, and the tears nearly welled up again—"I thought you looked unhappy, Aunt Julia, and I—felt sorry."

A curious change came over Miss Garland's countenance. "There is always some fresh trouble to bear," she said, but not unkindly; and as she turned away there was a mist before her eyes which blinded her to the dust lying on the precious old china, which no one but herself was allowed to touch.

All the rest of that day she scarcely spoke, and Dorothea was left to bear, as best she could, the curiosity and anxiety which filled her. She was pretty well accustomed, though, to wanting to know something, and having to suppress her desires. Very often she made up answers to her own questions; wonderful answers they were as a rule. To-day's ques-

## A Visit from Uncle Tom

tions were, though, the most exciting she had ever had to find answers for, and somehow she could not think of one that satisfied her.

It was fortunate for her, and her puzzled little head, that Miss Garland, in her desire to be alone to think out her own problems, bade her put on her overall and go into the garden to pick up the laburnum petals which littered the grass; though even there her questionings followed her, and, fast though her fingers gathered up the dead blossom, her thoughts flew faster.

"They've every right to ask to see her," Uncle Baxter had said. "I am sure 'her' was me," decided Dorothea, losing, as usual, all hold on her grammar. "Nobody but me has been a worry to Aunt Julia for six years."

Dorothea had got her answers all right so far, but, if somebody wanted her, why wasn't Aunt Julia glad instead of unhappy? Surely she must be pleased at the thought of getting rid of her! The problem was beyond her, but she never had been able to understand Aunt Julia. She only knew that nothing that ever happened was right, or seemed to please her. So Dorothea gave her thoughts to that other person, that mysterious person who had the right to see her. "Had the right! Then it must be a relation," she decided; "and it is somebody Aunt Julia and Uncle Baxter don't



## A Cottage Rose

like. Perhaps it is one of Father's relations ! I expect he had some."

Her heart thrilled at the thought. She had never known her father, nor anyone belonging to him, for he had died when she was but two years old ; and a little more than two years later her mother, with a sigh of relief, and only one regret, had closed her eyes and followed him. Her regret was that she was leaving her baby girl behind her.

" There is no one to love us now, my precious," she had sobbed forlornly. " You will have to win love for yourself when I am gone, and make your own little corner in this great, cold, hard world, where everything might be so beautiful if people would only be kind and forgiving to each other."

" P'r'aps it is one of Daddy's relations who wants to see me," Dorothea repeated again in an awed voice ; and overcome by the wonderful possibilities which opened out before her, she sat back on her kneeling mat and forgot all about the laburnum petals.

The robin came hopping over the grass toward her, eyeing her keenly out of his sharp black eyes. " Sweet, sweet ! " he chirruped, " Oh, Mr Robin, darling," cried Dorothea rapturously, " I'm so excited I don't know what to do ! Such wonderful things may be going to happen ! " Here she dropped her

## A Visit from Uncle Tom

voice to a whisper, for she felt sure that if Aunt Julia knew that she guessed something unusual was happening, Aunt Julia would see that it did not happen after all. "Sweet!" said the robin again, but he did not seem at all sympathetic; he was much more interested in some ants he saw over by the hedge than he was in Dorothea. So Dorothea dreamed her dreams by herself. It was safer, and she was almost accustomed to a lack of sympathy.

"I wonder if it's a granny, or an uncle, or an aunt, or a cousin, who has the right to see me? And, oh! I hope they make Aunt Julia let me go to stay with them. I wonder if they live by the sea? I hope they do, and that I shall have a bedroom all to myself, with the window looking right out on the beach. Oh, how perfectly lovely that would be! Perhaps they will keep a pony too, and——"

"Dorothea, have you forgotten the time? Dinner is ready to put on the table, and you have not washed your hands, or changed!"

"Oh, dear!" thought Dorothea, coming out of dreams into reality. "Oh, dear! I wonder if I shall always do everything wrong if I go to stay with new relations. I'd almost rather not know any more; there will only be more to scold me!" And she sighed dolefully as she passed a brush hastily over her hair, and ran downstairs, drying her hands on her handkerchief as she went.

## CHAPTER III

### COMING CHANGES FOR DOROTHEA

A little thought and a little kindness are worth more than a great deal of money.—RUSKIN

**T**HAT afternoon Dorothea had another great surprise, but a wholly pleasant one this time. They had put away the dinner things, and Dorothea was just about to take out her knitting and retire to the parlour with it for a whole long dreary afternoon, when Aunt Julia remarked quietly, "We will sit in the garden this afternoon, Dorothea, and work out there, if it keeps nice and warm."

Dorothea was so overjoyed that she almost clapped her hands together, knitting-needles and all. "What a day of s'prises this is," she thought. "I wonder why s'prises always come together, and some days don't have any. Most days don't have any." She was too happy, though, to worry about the days that did not have any. Suddenly to find that she was to spend the whole long afternoon in the sunshine, instead of only gazing out at it longingly from the dreary old parlour, had sent her into a seventh heaven of delight. She took it for

## Coming Changes for Dorothea

granted that Aunt Julia must like it too, or she would never have thought of it. Dorothea did not understand that the reason for the change was that her aunt, while her head and her heart were so distracted by the thoughts which filled them, shrank from being alone with her niece in the depressing parlour, where they were so close to each other that they seemed almost able to read each other's thoughts. In the garden Dorothea would find plenty to distract her attention from her aunt.

But Dorothea was over-excited by all that had happened; she was so happy too, and there was so much to see that she really could not keep her tongue still. She might as well have done so, though, for Miss Garland seemed deaf to everything she said, and presently rose without a word and went into the house, leaving Dorothea surprised and wondering.

Julia Garland made her way straight through the house to her bedroom, without a glance at anything, but as she mounted the steep narrow staircase she leaned on the banisters in a way quite unusual with her, and even forgot to look to see if she had made finger-marks on the polished wood.

"I don't seem able to get peace and quiet anywhere," she said impatiently, "and I must have a few minutes to myself to think things over;" and then: "Why couldn't they

## A Cottage Rose

let us be? Why couldn't they leave me in peace after all this time!"

She sat down on the chair by her bedside and leaned her head wearily against the wall. Her mind was dazed. She could not think clearly, nor come to any decision. She hated having to give in to those Pomeroy's; she hated having anything to do with them; she had hoped she would never hear or think of them again. They had brought misery enough on her; and now they claimed Dorothea, or as good as claimed her. They asked to see her, to have her, for a time only, but Julia Garland would share nothing with a Pomeroy.

"I've had her all these years, and they never showed any care—whether she was alive or dead, clothed and fed, or starving!" But here her conscience interrupted her: "You do not know; you cannot honestly say that, for you would not open the letters that came. You have complained bitterly, too, of the trouble and expense the poor child has been to you, yet now that someone has come to relieve you of her, you complain of that too. And, after all, it need be only for a little while that you give her up. You have had six years in which to teach her to love you as her second mother, and this as her real home. You are the only one she has had to love all that time. Have you taught her to do so? Have you

## Coming Changes for Dorothea

loved her and shown her that you do? If so, she will want to come back to you."

Miss Garland evaded the questions her conscience put to her. She was ashamed to face them. *Had* she ever tried to make Dorothea feel anything but the obligation she was under to her aunt for providing her with food and clothes and house-room, when no one else offered them?

"Those who love share freely with those they love. There is no thought of obligation."

Miss Garland's conscience did not spare her. She knew that she had failed in her duty. She had given Dorothea food, but it must often have tasted bitter in her mouth. She had given her a bed, but it must often have galled and bruised her poor little tender body. She had given her clothes of a sort, but it takes more than clothing to keep one warm and comfortable. Bitter winds are easier to bear than a bitter tongue. Clothing cannot take the place of love, and she had steadily refused her love. And why?

Simply because her hard pride and her self-love were greater than her charity. Julia Garland would never have admitted it to any living being, but she could not contradict her conscience, and her heart felt sick within her, for now she had none of the hold on Dorothea that she might have had. She had no hold at all of her own making. The child had



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yearned for love, she had pleaded to be loved and to give love in return, but in vain.

Miss Garland rose, and, going to an old bureau, unlocked a drawer, and from the back of it drew out a box. From the box she took two letters tied together with a piece of worsted. Fingering them almost as though she feared them, she drew one from its envelope and read it.

"My dearest Julia," it began, "When I am dead you surely will not refuse to read a letter from me? That you may know for certain that I am not trying to work on your feelings for my own benefit, I shall give orders that this is not to go to you until I am dead. But, Julia, I am begging on behalf of another. When I am gone my baby, my little Dorothea, will be alone in this foreign land. Will you take her into your home and care for her? I do not ask it for my sake, but for the sake of the days when we were little children, and, I think, loved each other. I at any rate loved you. Oh, my sister, do befriend and love my baby child! I know it is a great thing I ask of you, but you have a great heart, Julia, though you like to pretend you have none. All that you lavish on Dorothea she will, I know, repay you in the years to come. She is such a loving, sensitive darling, and quiet and obedient too.

## Coming Changes for Dorothea

"Julia, will you try to forgive me now? I have never ceased to love you, or to hope that some day we might be again to each other what we were as children. It is two years since John died, and I wrote to you in my bitter trouble, but you did not answer. Perhaps you felt you could not, or perhaps the letter did not reach you, or I asked too much. My dear sister, do not let this last dying request of mine be too much for you to grant.

"It may not be for long that she will be a drag upon you, for if her father's people come forward and claim her they have the right to her, and they are rich and can afford to keep her. I think John's mother would love her for his sake, and I feel I owe her some return for having robbed her of her son.

"It breaks my heart to leave my darling and my only joy, but if it were not for that I should be too happy in the thought that soon I will be with John again.

"Good-bye, Julia. I send you my grateful love. Will you accept it?—HELEN."

Miss Garland glanced through the letter swiftly, as though it was too painful to dwell upon. She was trying to close her eyes and her mind to all but the one short message, the one which most concerned her now—the wish that her father's people should have the child if they asked for her. Yes, there it was, and

## A Cottage Rose

expressed in the plainest language. Miss Garland's lips quivered as she read.

"Then that settles it," she said aloud. With trembling fingers she picked up the other, an unopened letter, and tied the two together again.

The other was the letter Helen Pomeroy had written in her "bitter trouble" when her husband died. Not having opened it, Miss Garland was in ignorance as to John's death, or Dorothea's birth, until Helen was dead too. And Helen's dying letter would probably have shared the same fate had it not come in one from a stranger who told her of her sister's death and asked for directions as to what she was to do with the little orphaned child.

When she received that communication Miss Garland received a shock, and while still suffering from it she obeyed her sister's request and took her child into her home. It was an act of reparation on her part, and having performed it she felt that she had done all that could be asked of her.

Dorothea sat alone in the garden with her hands lying idle in her lap, her mind lost in thought. She had finished the leg of her stocking, and could do no more until her aunt came and took up the heel for her. It was very pleasant to sit there idle, with nothing to do but gaze up through the laburnum

## Coming Changes for Dorothea

branches at the blue sky or watch the birds and the butterflies. At least it was very pleasant for a time. By and by she began to grow tired of sitting still. She grew puzzled by her aunt's long absence, then impatient, then vaguely troubled. Had that cross old Uncle Tom come again with more secrets? she wondered. She sincerely hoped not; she hated mysteries, and she hated anything that upset Aunt Julia.

Presently she began to grow hungry and to long for it to be tea-time. She wished she might go indoors and get the tea. It would be lovely to put on the kettle and lay the cloth, and get everything ready as a pleasant surprise for Aunt Julia! She knew though, by experience, that that sort of surprise would be anything but pleasant to that lady, so she sat still and waited with what patience she could.

When at last Miss Garland did appear it was quite twenty minutes after the usual hour for tea—a most unheard-of thing in that punctual home; and, greatest surprise of all, she did not seem at all vexed or cross. Dorothea looked up at her questioningly, then quickly removed her eyes. If it had not been too impossible she would have thought that Aunt Julia had been crying. Her eyelids certainly looked very pink and rather swollen.

“I—I thought we might have our tea out here,” said Miss Garland. She spoke almost

## A Cottage Rose

as though she was shy at making such an astounding suggestion.

"Tea!—out here!" Dorothea positively gasped, for such a wonderful event had never before happened in all the years that she had lived there. "Oh, Aunt Julia, how lovely!"

"Well, come and help me out with the things, and don't trip and break ever so many."

The mere thought of such a disaster set Dorothea's hands trembling. It would be too dreadful if she did meet with an accident just when Aunt Julia was beginning to trust her. It would probably mean that she would never be allowed to have tea in the garden again.

"I will carry only one plate at a time," she said solemnly. "I would rather go a hundred times than break one thing. If I carried something in each hand I might trip over the steps, or let the cake slip off on to the ground." So she went to and fro, to and fro, very carefully, with very trembling limbs, but triumphant.

"Oh!" she cried, her hands clasped between her knees in a very ecstasy of enjoyment. "Oh, Aunt Julia, isn't this perfectly lovely?"

An unmistakable look of satisfaction came over Miss Garland's face. "Would you be sorry to leave it, Dorothea?"

"Leave it!" repeated Dorothea, sobering suddenly as a vision rose before her of herself





SHE WENT TO AND FRO VERY CAREFULLY





## Coming Changes for Dorothea

being ordered to bed for some naughtiness she had forgotten.

“ Yes.” Miss Garland spoke stiffly, as though she could hardly get out her words. “ Would you be sorry to go away, and never have tea in the garden, or play here, any more ? ”

She forgot that Dorothea had never before had tea there, or played, except the games she had played in fancy—her imaginings, she called them. All the same, Dorothea felt that she would be very sorry to go away and leave it, and the laburnums and the robins, and the rest. And where could she go ? She knew no other home, nor any other place than Blybury, and every one but Aunt Julia was a stranger to her.

Her heart sank at the thought of it. “ Oh, but I couldn’t go away—at least—I——” she hesitated. Miss Julia had always impressed on her that there was no such word as ‘ couldn’t.’ “ I mean—I should not like it at all. Do you want to send me away, Aunt Julia ? ” This seemed so possible and so probable that her eyes, as they caught her aunt’s eyes, were full of frightened questioning. All the flavour had suddenly died out of her bread and butter and her tea ; even the cake was quite untempting.

“ No,” answered Miss Julia slowly as she stirred the sugar in her tea, “ I can’t say that I want to—I don’t want to. I don’t like changes, and all the worry and upset they bring.

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I have got used to having you here, and I'm willing to go on as we are."

"Then why need I go away, Aunt Julia—or haven't I really got to?"

"Your uncle and your Grandmother Pomeroy want you—your father's relations."

"I didn't know I'd got any!" cried Dorothea, her face lighting up with interest. Miss Garland read the change in the little face, and her pain increased, also her bitterness.

"How should you?" she commented sarcastically. "They have never shown before that they even knew that you existed, or cared. You might have died of want for all the interest they took in you." She had again forgotten the letters that had come. "They left it to others to have the trouble of you when you were little, but now that you are getting to be a big girl, and might be useful, they suddenly find that they are dying to have you. There's never a thought for me or my feelings. I suppose I am so inferior I am not expected to have any."

Dorothea was puzzled. She had heard so much of the trouble and expense she was to her aunt that she thought she would have been delighted at being saved both. "But nothing seems to please Aunt Julia," she sighed wearily. "I do wish I knew of something that would."

She herself was very glad that she had other relations than the Garlands and the Baxters,

## Coming Changes for Dorothea

but why she, Dorothea, might not love them all, and why her aunt was so cross about it, was more than she could understand. After all, her father's relatives might not have known where she was; or perhaps they had written to Aunt Julia and the letter had never reached her.

"Oh, dear, why can't they all be nice and kind to each other?" sighed Dorothea again. "It would be so lovely."

"Then am I to go to stay with them, Aunt Julia?" she asked presently, seeing that her aunt did not seem inclined to say any more on the subject. She spoke very quietly. She had already begun to realize that it would be better not to show too much interest or eagerness.

"That is for me to decide," answered Miss Garland coldly, and Dorothea never dreamed that behind that cold manner her aunt's heart was heavy and sad at the thought of the coming parting, and with regret for the opportunity she had lost of winning her little niece's whole love, a love for which she longed now, but which she had repelled and pushed from her until the child was afraid to offer it again.

Dorothea could not know that her heart still ached with wounded pride and hot anger at things which had been said and done a dozen years ago, when a son of the proud Pomeroy's had secretly and against their wishes married

## A Cottage Rose

pretty Helen Garland. The bitterness of that time had never died out of Julia Garland's heart, and Dorothea had been made to feel it.

That night Miss Garland wrote to Yabsley Park.

“Madam—The child Dorothea will be sent to you some time during the next month. Of course you understand that if she goes to you all connexion between her and myself must cease, as I will have nothing to do with you or with your family. I would rather part with my niece entirely, though, having supported her for six years, and having all the care and trouble of looking after her, I have every right to keep her, if I choose. Of the day and hour of her arrival you will be informed when the time comes.—JULIA GARLAND.”

Until she had written the letter Miss Garland could not rest, and having written it she knew no happiness. Dorothea was going away from her—for ever. She tried to realize what the house would be like without her ; then she tried not to realize it. To lessen her pain she tried to rouse the old anger by going back over those days when young John Pomeroy, who had come to Blybury for the fishing, had met, and loved at first sight, the younger daughter of the hospitable farmer through whose land the river ran. Julia had watched the growing friendship with disapproval. She knew that the Pomeroy

## Coming Changes for Dorothea

of Yabsley Manor would look higher than a farmer's daughter for a wife for their son, even though he was not the heir.

No doubts troubled the lovers, however, at least not until John wrote home and told his parents that they were engaged. He knew they would disapprove, but he little dreamed of the storm that would break about his head and Helen's.

The letters that came, not only to him but to Helen's parents, made Julia Garland's cheeks flame even now as she recalled them. The engagement was broken off at once. Helen's parents were sterner even than John's. John was ordered home. Helen was locked in her room, and they were both forbidden to write or to meet.

Oh, that unhappy time! The misery and shame and bitterness had never faded from Julia Garland's mind.

And then, when they thought all was ended, they one day found Helen's room empty. She had run away and married her lover, and her family never saw her again.

Miss Julia never forgot the dreadful days that followed. She remembered distinctly all the terrible things that were said both by her people and John Pomeroy's, things that could never be unsaid, nor, in her opinion, ever be forgiven or forgotten—not, at any rate, by the Garlands



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or the Baxters, for Mr Pomeroy had accused them of helping on the elopement in their desire to be connected with so old and distinguished a family as his, and this had been the bitterest insult of all.

Mr Garland wrote a reply which should have humbled even the proudest of the Pomeroy's, and after that he had returned, through his solicitor, any other letters which came.

Since Dorothea's arrival Miss Julia had done the same, even though they were in the handwriting of John's mother ; but no one knew this but herself.

Her father, and John's, had died soon after, enemies to the last, and two years later John had followed them. Then Helen's mother had passed away, longing, as Julia well knew, for a sight of her younger daughter, and for forgiveness among them all. But Mrs Garland wanted more than they could give her, and died broken-hearted, as Julia never ceased to remember.

She never gave a thought of pity to John's poor mother, who lived broken-hearted, longing vainly for her boy, and, after his death, for the little child he had left behind him—her only grandchild.

Julia Garland never could realize that others suffered as much as she did, perhaps more. If she had but read Mrs Pomeroy's sad letters and touching appeals she might have understood,

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and have spared herself years of misery and bitterness.

But Julia had sent them all back unopened, dealing that sad heart a blow which it was ill able to bear.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE OLD LIFE COMES TO AN END

If we should grow—just you and I—  
Kinder and sweeter-hearted,  
Perhaps in some near by-and-by  
A good time might get started ;  
Then what a happy world 'twould be  
For you and me—for you and me !

**A**T breakfast the next morning both Dorothea and her aunt looked pale and tired. Miss Garland had scarcely slept at all, and Dorothea but very little. Excitement, rather a pleasant excitement, had kept her awake.

“I have written to Mrs Pomeroy to tell her I am sending you next month,” Miss Garland remarked when they had nearly finished breakfast.

“Oh ! Am I really to go ?” Dorothea gasped with excitement, a rush of bright colour spread over her face and neck, and her eyes shone. She had been in a state of suppressed questioning ever since the previous evening, and at last had come to believe that it had all been a big mistake, an impossibility. Of course Aunt Julia would not let her go from Laburnum

## The Old Life Comes to an End

Cottage, to travel to new places and people where she might do and say things, and eat and drink and wear things, that she, Miss Garland, highly disapproved of. Oh, no, Aunt Julia would never consent to that!

She would have to live in Blybury all her life, in the same dull round of scoldings and fault-findings. And now, to her intense surprise and joy, Aunt Julia unexpectedly announced that she actually was to be allowed to go, that she really was to take that wonderful journey to her father's people, and within a few weeks too!

Almost in the same moment Dorothea began to wonder what her new relations would be like. Would they understand little girls, and be kind, or would they be like the Garlands and the Baxters?

"Of course, Dorothea"—Miss Garland's voice broke in on her musings—"you understand that you are choosing between your grandmother and me for ever. When you leave this house for hers you will never come back to it again. If you are not happy there, you will have to make the best of it. You understand, don't you?"

Her words, so calm, so decisive, fell on Dorothea's heart like a blow. She felt as though a door had been slammed in her face, shutting her out in the cold. "Never come back!" she gasped, only half comprehending;

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"but—why? Isn't this my home, Aunt Julia?"

"It will not be after this month."

Dorothea's eyes filled with tears. It seemed so cruel, so heartless, to shut her out like that.

"But—can't I stay with my grandmother, just sometimes, and come back here to live?"

"No," said Miss Garland decisively. "When you go to the Pomeroy's you become a Pomeroy, as well as being one by name, and no Garland—no one belonging to me could have associations with any of that family."

"But I shall be just the same," pleaded Dorothea. "I shan't be different just because I've stayed there a little while."

"Yes, you will. You will be a Pomeroy, and you have got to choose between your mother's folk and your father's."

In her heart she was longing for the child to say: "Then I will choose my mother's folk. I will stay with you, Aunt Julia." But Dorothea did not know that; indeed, she could not have believed it if anyone had told her. She had heard so much of the trouble and expense she was, she never doubted but that her aunt would be glad to be relieved of her, and so she felt she ought, however much she shrank from it, to relieve her of the burden and go where she was wanted. There is something consoling, too, in going where you know you are wanted.

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So, with misunderstanding on both sides, the word which could have made them understand and love each other better, the word which would have made one, at least, much happier, was never spoken.

The next day Miss Garland, taking Dorothea with her, started for the nearest town. "How I am ever going to get your things ready in time, I don't know," she said irritably; "there is no end to the things you'll have to have."

To Dorothea it seemed that there was no end to what was bought for her. Never in all her life before had she had such a supply of clothes. Miss Garland bought boots, shoes, gloves, stockings, calico and embroidery, material for two dresses—a plum-coloured merino and a dark brown one. "They wear well and don't show the dirt," Miss Garland remarked approvingly. But Dorothea looked longingly at prettier things, and saw no charm in them.

"They would do for Aunt Julia herself," she thought, her taste being for a pretty blue cashmere, and one the colour of a dove's breast.

Then there were hats to choose, and again Dorothea had to lift her fancy from a pretty little sun-hat, trimmed with a wreath of butter-cups, and a white straw 'best' hat, with a big ruche of grey ribbon and pink round the crown, and try to like instead a hard black thing which



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was much too large for her, and a black 'chip' with a band and bow of plum-coloured ribbon for its only adornment. "It will be serviceable," said the shop-woman—but she shot a look of sympathy at Dorothea—"and anyone can see that the 'chip' is a good one—but wouldn't you prefer a white one for the little lady?"

"No," said Miss Julia decisively, "I would not. I prefer black. I like things to be good. If they are good they always look well."

Dorothea wondered if all good things must be ugly, and if all pretty things were bad. "It seems a pity that there is such a lot of difference between looking pretty and looking good. I always like best those that look pretty, but I never have them."

After the hats had been bought they went to another department and bought materials for aprons, good stout holland and white nainsook, some handkerchiefs, and two dark-brown hair ribbons. Then they went further and bought an umbrella and a coat.

"Oh, dear, what a lot of money I am costing!" sighed Dorothea as she followed her aunt to the coat department. Miss Garland gave a little grunt, which sounded more like "You are, indeed!" than anything else, but she did not speak.

"Coats?" said the attendant, "for this little lady? You would like something new and

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pretty, I am sure," and she smiled at Dorothea. "Is it to go with any particular costume?"

"No!" Miss Garland snapped out the word so sharply that she made the girl jump. "I want no fal-lals. I want a good serviceable dark grey, or brown—or black would do. It must be something that will go with anything."

Dorothea's appealing eyes touched the attendant's heart. "I will show you what we have, madam," she said, and going away soon returned with an armful of coats, the sight of which made Dorothea's eyes glisten. There was a pretty blue one, a red, a green, and a white one; there was a soft grey one too, with large horn buttons. Dorothea did hope Miss Garland would prefer that.

But Miss Garland waved them all away at once. "I don't want any of those things," she snapped; "I want one that will do for all occasions."

"This grey one, madam, would——"

"If you haven't any others I can go elsewhere." Miss Garland began to gather up her handbag and umbrella.

"I'll bring you some others," said the girl with a sigh, which she instantly suppressed. There was nothing to be done but bring forward the ugly grey and black and brown things that Miss Garland loved and Dorothea hated. She longed to say out boldly: "But they don't

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'go' with a single thing ; they are too hideous." But she had not the effrontery. She could not, however, even pretend to take any interest in them, and while one hideous garment after another was put on her and taken off again she stood like a dummy, never glancing at them or making a remark. She heard her aunt's voice going all the time: "No, I don't think it is at all too big; one must allow for growing, of course." "No, no pockets, she'll only be stuffing her hands into them all the time," etc., etc. Dorothea did not know, or care, on which her aunt's choice fell finally. All the rest of the day she was quiet and dispirited. She was very, very tired.

"Don't sulk, Dorothea, because you can't have exactly what you like best."

"I am not sulking, Aunt Julia."

"Then it's a very good imitation of it," retorted Aunt Julia tartly.

"I don't think being disappointed is the same as being sulky," Dorothea thought to herself. She could not deny that she was bitterly disappointed, and that deep down in her heart she had an angry feeling that her aunt purposely chose ugly things to disappoint and aggravate her.

The next morning, as soon as the housework was done, there was a grand cutting-out, and then day after day Dorothea was kept hard

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at work stitching, stitching from morning till night. At first she found it quite interesting, for she thought all the time of where she would be when she was wearing the things, and it was really very fascinating trying to picture her new home and her new relations.

But after a while she grew weary even of that. She longed for a little play-time, for a story-book, but most of all for fresh air. "May I take my sewing into the garden this afternoon, Aunt Julia?" she asked at last in desperation.

"No," replied Miss Julia promptly, "you stare about you when you are out of doors, and we have no time to waste."

So Dorothea gave up that hope, but the longing to escape to a home where she might have some freedom grew stronger and stronger in her heart, and made her more eager for the day of departure.

When exactly that was to be, Miss Garland had not condescended to tell her. She had said at the beginning that it was to be in a month's time, but whether that meant thirty days, or thirty-one, or four weeks, Dorothea did not know. Her heart beat very fast when she thought that there might be only seven days more to wait, for already twenty-one had slipped away. She had marked thirty-one strokes on a sheet of paper, and struck off one each morning.

On the twenty-eighth day her heart almost

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stood still when she went up to her room to make herself tidy for dinner, for there by the fireplace stood an open trunk, ready to be packed.

"Oh!" she gasped, "has the time come?"

"You are to go on Thursday. Your grandmother has written to say that someone will meet the afternoon train."

"And I shall be in it!" gasped Dorothea in a voice full of awe.

"Well, it's to be hoped so. It would be a pity to give all that trouble for nothing."

"Am I to go all by myself, Aunt Julia?" Already she was trembling with excitement and nervousness at the thought of it.

"I can't go with you. Unless"—she added, as though speaking her thoughts aloud, "I get out at the last station before you get there." But on reflection she decided that that would be undignified, and Dorothea must go alone.

"I should think I could trust you to behave properly just for a few hours," she said in a tone of reproof. "I will put you into the train here, and all you have to do is to sit still until the train draws up at Yabsley. That is the station you get out at. There will be some one there to take charge of you. You must give me your word that you will sit still, and not go near the window. One can never tell if the door

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is fastened securely or not. Many a life has been lost because people will lean against the door, or put their heads out of the window just when there's a tunnel coming, and of course they get their heads knocked off; they could not expect anything else." Dorothea gave a little cry of horror, and clasped her head as though she felt the crash on her own skull.

"Well, it's the only way to teach some folks," added Miss Garland severely, "they'll never listen to warnings."

"Oh, Aunt Julia, I will! I will promise to be very good. I will really."

"Um!" doubtfully, "that's all right—if you don't forget. I'll tell the guard, though, to keep an eye on you," she added in the tone which said as plainly as words, "I don't trust you"; and again the child felt glad that she was going away. Perhaps someone at Yabsley Manor would trust her.

The next day Miss Garland began to pack Dorothea's box. A glow of satisfaction warmed her heart as she looked at the collection of clothing she was sending with her niece. It had cost more than she could afford, for everything was of good quality, and she had bought a generous supply—far too much, really, for a growing girl, and one going to rich relations, too—but she did not grudge it. The Pomeroy's would see that she knew how to clothe the child,



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that she was not one to buy cheap, common stuff. But what she did not see was the woeful ugliness of it all.

Throughout the last day, while the packing was going on, Dorothea wandered about the house and garden in a fever of restlessness. She felt nervous, home-sick, and depressed. If she had been told then that she was to remain at Laburnum Cottage, she would have been glad. With nothing else to bestow her love upon, she had lavished it generously on the trees and bushes, the birds and flowers, on the house itself, and upon her own little bedroom with the sweet white roses festooning the window. All day she wandered round saying last farewells, and fighting hard to keep back the tears which would force themselves into her eyes.

"I hope Aunt Julia won't say we will have tea in the garden," she thought nervously, "I—I couldn't b-bear it."

Fortunately Aunt Julia, too, felt that she could not bear it, so Dorothea was spared that trial. Indeed, Miss Julia was exceedingly busy on that last day, busy with work she made for herself, so that there should be no time for thinking; indeed, it seemed as if there was scarcely time for meals even, for they were cut shorter than they had ever been before. All day Dorothea looked at her aunt with wistful,

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appealing eyes, and all day Miss Garland tried to avoid meeting them. Dorothea was yearning for sympathy, for just one sign of love, and if even then Julia Garland had taken her little niece in her arms, and drawn her head down upon her breast, and had given her but one little glimpse of the pain which was filling her own heart, she would have won for ever the love of the warmly affectionate little nature.

Perhaps, had she heard the choking sobs which Dorothea tried to stifle with her bed-clothes, the ice in her nature might have melted, but she had her own face buried in her pillow, and her own sobs, dry and hard though they were, drowned all sounds of Dorothea's grief, and when morning came it found both heavy-eyed and white-faced, but as far from each other as ever. Both owned to having headaches, but neither spoke of the heartache, which was far worse.

## CHAPTER V

### GUARD JEFFREYS

Just a gentle smile will cheer us  
When life's hill is very steep,  
Just a kindly word will help us  
When a frown would make us weep.

**O**H, it was a miserable morning, the morning of Dorothea's departure! Out of doors the rain drizzled thick and heavy, the clouds hung black, and the air was close and full of thunder. Within doors gloom reigned everywhere.

Aunt and niece were so depressed and uncomfortable that it was a relief to both when their last meal together was ended and they need no longer pretend to eat. Yet when the time came for Dorothea to put on her hat and coat, and she climbed the narrow staircase for the last time, she felt chilled and sick with nervousness and sorrow. Even her new hat and coat and gloves afforded her no pleasure, nor even her new umbrella with the tassels on the handle. She noted the fact with some interest in her own feelings, for it made her seem so very grown up and old.

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When she had put on her boots and hat, and coat and scarf, she gently opened her window as wide as it would go, and leaned out for a very last look at all the things she loved. A great spray of roses brushed against her cheek, leaving drops like tears behind them. Dorothea took the spray in her fingers and gently kissed it. "Good-bye, you dear little roses, good-bye ! They say I am never to come back to you, but I must, I must—and I will ; and mind you go on and flower each year till I come, and I'll think about you, and I'll never, never forget you ! "

She put out her hand and patted the old stone sill, for she felt then that she loved even the stones around her window. At one corner a little piece had been chipped out ; it had been loose ever since Dorothea had been at Laburnum Cottage, and for some reason, she could not have said why, she had made it her special care to see that it did not get swept or blown away. More than once Miss Garland had flipped it into the garden below with her duster, and Dorothea had searched until she had found it again. Now she picked it out of its niche and dropped it into the little handbag which lay on the bed, ready for her to pick up at the last moment. "It will only be lost if I leave it there," she whispered. "There will be nobody to take care of it when I am gone."

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And to herself she added : " It will seem like having a bit of my own room always with me. I will take such care of it, and if ever I come back I will fit it in its place again."

The thought brought a sense of comfort to the frightened, homesick, overwrought little maid. " I think Aunt Julia will not mind," she thought ; " she didn't even know it was there." Then she gathered a spray of the sweet old-fashioned cottage roses, and pinned them to her coat. She looked upon them as especially her own because they grew up round her window.

" P'r'aps she will let me wear them as it's the last time I'll ever be able to——"

" Dorothea ! Dorothea ! aren't you ready yet ? " her aunt's voice came loudly up the stairs, but with a kinder note than usual in it.

" I think she will let me, this once," repeated Dorothea, noticing the kinder note. " Coming, Aunt Julia," she called back ; " I am coming." But when she had crossed the threshold she stepped back again. " Good-bye," she whispered, " good-bye, dear little room ! I will come back to you some day. I promise I will—if I possibly can."

" Dorothea ! Are you coming, or do you wish to miss the train ? " The gentleness was rapidly dying out of Miss Garland's voice.

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"Coming, Aunt Julia! Oh, if she gets cross she will make me take off my roses, and then they'll die!" Without another backward look, Dorothea ran out, and down the stairs. At the first glance Miss Garland noted the roses. Dorothea saw that she did, and trembled.

"I—I picked a few, I—thought p'r'aps you wouldn't mind, Aunt Julia, as it's the last time? I do love them so. I—I wanted to take a few with me"—and then the tears welled up and over, splashing down on the new coat and the roses. But even then Miss Julia did not scold.

"Of course—you are welcome"—Miss Julia's voice trembled, and her thin lips lost their hard line—"but—they are only common ones; where you are going they would be looked down upon, and I don't care for anything of mine to be scorned." Miss Garland's voice failed her entirely.

"But they shan't be!" cried Dorothea, very fierce and red at once. "If anyone speaks unkindly of them I'll come right back again, and she held her little brown hands over her roses protectingly. And so, at the moment of parting, aunt and niece came nearer understanding each other than ever in their lives before.

"If—if they aren't kind to you, or—or if



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you want to come back, you will find a home here," said Miss Julia stiffly. She spoke stiffly because it was new to her to unbend, or to be so gracious. She had not intended to say so much; indeed, she had intended not to give way, but somehow her will had weakened.

Dorothea looked up at her, her face full of pleasure, for, oddly enough, the words brought her great comfort. "Oh, thank you, Aunt Julia, I shall be sure to come!"

"Um! You may think so now, but you wait a bit. When you have settled down, and once taken to the grandeur, and the luxuries, and the fine folk, you will never make up your mind to leave them, I know. You will soon forget—though you don't think so now. Make haste and put on your gloves."

"I am sure I shan't forget," said Dorothea, but to herself, in spite of the change in her aunt's voice and manner, her old nervousness came over her again.

"There's the omnibus come."

Dorothea's heart seemed to drop down and down.

"Have you got everything? Your purse, and two handkerchiefs, and your bag?"

Dorothea could only nod "Yes." Her lips trembled so much that she could not utter a word; then, without another glance at anything, she stepped quickly out of the house and down the

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garden. As she clambered into the bus her face was almost as white as the roses which nodded down at her from her bedroom window.

The smiling conductor went in and brought out her luggage, then Miss Julia came out, locked the front door behind her, bolted her gate, and climbed into the bus too. The man on the box touched up his horses, and Dorothea's great adventure had begun. In their hearts both aunt and niece were wishing this first stage was over, and the parting too—and yet, and yet——!

When Miss Garland was back in her home again, with the doors locked to secure herself against unwanted visitors, the emptiness and stillness everywhere pressed on her with a weight almost heavier than she could bear. And poor Dorothea, seated in the very middle of the seat in the third-class compartment, which she had entirely to herself, cried until her face was disfigured, and her eyes almost blinded, and her nice new handkerchiefs were so wet they could not dry another tear.

She longed to go to the window to hang them where the breeze would dry them, but Aunt Julia had told her to keep away from the windows, and the only solace she could find now was in obeying her aunt's every wish. So she sat where she was, and held her

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handkerchiefs tight in her hand, hoping that the heat of it would dry them a little, for she still needed them every other moment.

"I ought to have put five or six in my bag," she said ruefully, "but I never thought about crying."

The heat in the carriage grew more and more intense, for the rain had ceased by this time and the sun come out. It was beating down hotly on the roof and pouring in at one of the windows, both of which had been closed tight by Miss Garland; and Dorothea's new coat, which was thick and heavy, was buttoned closely from top to bottom over one of her new merino frocks, and it was a day for muslins! It never occurred to her to loosen her coat or take it off. Aunt Julia had always insisted that coats were meant to be buttoned up, and buttoned she would have them.

"What is the use of a coat if it is flying off your shoulders all the time?" she used to ask. "It only looks fast and common, and silly into the bargain."

By and by the guard came along and looked in at Dorothea. Miss Garland had put her in his charge, as she had said she would.

"Well, missie," he said cheerfully, "'tis a warm day for travelling, and 'tis like a hot-house in here; I expect you would like one of the windows open," and without waiting for

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a reply he proceeded to lower one as far as it would go.

Dorothea did not say anything ; she thought her aunt would not object if some one else did it, and, oh!—she was so thankful for the breath of air that came in, for her head was aching! Her face was scarlet and throbbing with heat and pain. She was really almost exhausted.

The guard, who was accustomed to travellers of all kinds, read the tearful face, and knew that it was not only the heat of the day which had reduced this one to such a state.

“Sorry to leave your auntie, I expect, missie?” he said sympathetically. “Going to school? Never mind, the holidays will soon come, and we shall be carrying you back over this line all smiles and happiness.” But Dorothea shook her head.

“I am never going back,” she said tremulously, and wished she had another handkerchief. “I am not going to school—I am going to live with some relations for—for always.”

“For always! I see. Well, never mind, you’ll soon get accustomed to it, missie, and be as happy as the days are long, I expect. We never like leaving the places we’re ’customed to, do we? When I get orders to move, I’m as vexed about it as—but there, it’s wonderful

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how soon you get 'customed to things, and there's always something to like wherever you go."

"Is there?" anxiously.

"Why, bless me, yes, missie; and if there wasn't—well, there's no good done by whining about it—I mean"—hastily—"for a man like me. I'm old enough and big enough to know better. If I've got to go, well, I've got to, and fretting isn't going to stop it. But if I make up my mind to look the best side, and see what there is to like in the new place, why, it's surprising the difference it makes. I begin to feel happier right away. Now where I was living last I'd got the nicest bit of garden I'd ever had, and it cut me to the heart to have to go and leave it. Then I went down to Porth Freath, and there I found I'd got the sea close in front of me, and out to one side of my little house there was a bit of waste land. Well, first I thought I'd let it bide as waste land. I wouldn't make any more gardens. I'd only have to go and leave it again. But there—I couldn't help myself! My fingers itched to try and do the best I could with it, and I dug it, and I trenched it, and gave it new soil, and then I planted it, and you never saw such a bit of garden as that is now; the things don't seem able to grow thick and fast enough. It's close under the shelter of the cliff, and

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gets all the sun. It's wonderful to see a thing grow under your hand like that. It seems ever so much better than a ready-made garden."

"I hope you won't have to leave it, ever," said Dorothea sympathetically. "You would be dreadfully sorry now you've got it so nice."

"Well, miss, if I have to, I have to, and what's the use of grumbling? It never did any good yet, and you only fray out your own temper. To me grumbling folk are pretty near the worst evil one's got to face in this world. Don't you think so, missie? They make everybody and everything seem wrong, and life not worth living. I say that grumblers are bad for man and bad for beast, and bad for the world at large. I hope somebody 'll pull me up sharp if I start grumbling. I shouldn't like to be one of the folk that take all the sunshine out of the day for others, the same as some have done it for me. We don't get so much sunshine that we can afford to waste any."

Dorothea agreed politely. "Grumblers are people who are always finding fault and saying things are wrong, aren't they?"

"That describes them right enough, missie. If the world was perfect they wouldn't admit it; they'd grumble then because nothing was left 'em to grumble at. Those little roses of



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yours do smell sweet, miss. I don't know any that's got a sweeter scent than those 'cottage' roses, though some do call them common. Look at the way they grow, too—like as if they enjoyed it, and the buds are so pretty with the green growing up all round them ! ”

“ Would you like one ? ” asked Dorothea shyly.

The man's face lightened up. “ I couldn't say I wouldn't, missie, but I ain't going to take them from you ; they look so nice pinned on your coat, and I can see you're fond of 'em. So am I ; they put me in mind of my old home. Many's the time I've tried to get a bush, but I've never been lucky yet.”

Dorothea's hot, nervous fingers were busy detaching a little cluster of buds. “ Perhaps you'll find one where you are moved to next,” she suggested hopefully. “ I am so glad you like them, too. I love them. I hope they will have some where I am going, but they are rich people, and they have lovely gardens, and Aunt Julia said they would think this kind of rose too common. I do wish they wouldn't call the poor little things common. I think it's such a hateful word, don't you ? ”

“ That depends 'pon how it's said,” answered the guard gravely.

“ Does it ? I've never heard it said in a

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nice way." Then, as her companion made no reply, "When I grow up I am going to work very, very hard, and I'm going to have a little house of my own, and a big garden, and"—her face lighting up—"I shall have lots and lots of my roses. I call them my roses," she explained; "white ones, and pink. I'd rather have them than any other kind. I don't know where I should get them, though, for Aunt Julia says no one sells them now, they are so common."

The guard smiled at her encouragingly. "I tell you what, missie; if ever I get one I'll plant some cuttings for you; then they'll be all ready and waiting for you by the time you get your house."

Dorothea's face grew radiant. "Will you? Will you, really? Oh, how very, very kind of you! It will be perfectly lovely. I shall work harder than ever now to get my little house!—but I'm afraid," she added, looking at him gravely, "it will be a long time before I have money enough. You see, I am rather young."

"I reckoned you might be," with equal gravity. "It's rude, they say, to ask a lady's age, but—maybe in another twelve or fourteen years——"

"Oh, do you think I could earn enough to have a house when I am twenty-two or just a

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little more? I am ten now, ten and a bit. That makes me part way into the second ten, doesn't it?"

"Yes, missie. You're on the shady side of ten, right enough."

Dorothea did not smile, for it was all too serious to her. She was busy, too, groping about in her hand-bag for a pencil.

"Will you please write down your name and address for me, and I'll write down mine—oh, but I haven't got any paper!"

"I've got a pocket-book. There," handing her a fat, shiny note-book, "if you'll put it down in that I shan't lose it."

As well as the rolling and jolting of the train would allow her, Dorothea wrote her name and address in large round letters over two pages of the shiny note-book. "I don't know if you can read it," she said as she handed it to its owner, a troubled look on her little white face. "It is Dorothea Helen Pomeroy, Yabsley Park. I *can* write better, but the train does shake so. Of course I know it can't be helped," she hastened to add, fearing she might have been impolite.

The guard, though, was not offended in the least. "It does shake one up a bit," he remarked cheerfully. "But I've got so used to it. I can write better on board than if I ain't being shook!"

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At which Dorothea laughed ; she thought it so very funny. " You will have to get some one to shake the table for you when you write at home. Now please give me your address. I am afraid we may soon reach the station where I've got to get out."

" There's plenty of time, missie. This is my address—Guard John Jeffreys, G.W.R., Sea Cottage, Porth Freath, Cornwall."

" Oh ! " cried Dorothea excitedly. " Do you really live by the sea ? Oh, how happy you must be ! "

" I am when I'm there, but I come up by the morning train one day, and go down the next, so except on Sundays I don't get so very much sea air."

" Then you aren't able to have picnics on the beach and that sort of thing ? "

" No, missie ; and," with a twinkle in his kind eyes, " I haven't gone paddling or shrimping for I couldn't tell you how long ; and as for building sand-castles, why, I believe my bucket rusted out for want of use, and my spade got lost."

Dorothea shrieked with laughter. " Oh, I wish I could see you," she cried. " Won't you get another bucket and spade ? I wish you would ! I wonder if I shall ever go to stay by the sea ! I have never seen it yet, except when I came over from France, and I was

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so young then I don't remember anything about it; but I think there couldn't be anything lovelier in all the world than to live by the sea."

"I reckon you will some day, missie," said her new friend comfortingly. It did him good to see the sadness and wistfulness die out of her eyes, and hope come into them. "I reckon you'll have that there little house of yours by the sea and those roses of ours growing over it, and 'tis you'll be having the bucket and spade, and a shrimping net too, and pretty well you'll enjoy yourself, missie. Now I must go. We shall be at Yabsley in another few minutes."

"Thank you for talking to me," said Dorothea gratefully; "I feel better now."

"That's right, missie," he nodded back, smiling; and she thought he had gone, but a second later he stepped back again. "You'll get on, missie," he added, popping his head in round the door. "You've got plenty of pluck, I know; but things seem a bit too much for all of us sometimes."

"Poor little lady," he said gently as he put her roses in a mug of water that he had fixed up in one corner of his van. "She looks as though six months' free run by the sea, with half a dozen youngsters to play with, would do her all the good in the world. Well, anyhow,

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it cheered her up to talk a bit, and helped her over her journey."

Presently, as the sweet fragrance of the reviving roses crept through the hot, dingy van, his thoughts turned to Dorothea again. "Nicest little lady I've met for many a long day," he murmured, "and I see a good many. She's got a look in her eyes like my poor Vic had when I came along and saved her from the boys who were drowning her. Children ought never to look like that—shows there's something wrong somewhere, when they do. Well, I wish I could take her home, too. She and my missus would get on fine. I don't believe I'll ever see those white roses again without being put in mind of her, and if there's a bush of them to be got, I'll get them and send them to her."

Then he slipped on his coat, and gave up his mind to business, for the train was slowing down before drawing up in Yabsley Station.



## CHAPTER VI

### THE HOME OF HER FATHERS

The best place is wherever He puts us, and any other would be undesirable, because it would be our own choice.

**D**OROTHEA, in a flutter of nervousness, gathered up her umbrella and hand-bag, and clambered down from the carriage to the platform as best she could. It was not easy, for the step down was so high she had to take a leap, and, with her legs trembling as they were, she could not be sure if she would land on her feet or on her nose.

The old life had really come to an end now, she felt, and the new one was dreadfully, dreadfully close at hand.

“What must she do next?” she wondered, as she looked forlornly up and down the platform. “Would some one come up and speak to her, or must she speak to a porter?” She wished her friend the guard would come and help her, but he was talking to the station-master and a gentleman who seemed very agitated about something or other. The crowd on the platform was not great. There were only three persons there besides the station-

## The Home of Her Fathers

master, the guard, and the agitated gentleman. One was herself, the other was a tall thin man in what Dorothea thought was some kind of uniform, and the last was a little old woman with a basket of ducks. Dorothea felt sure that the little old woman with the ducks had not come to meet her, so it must be either the agitated gentleman or the one in uniform; and while she was making up her mind between these two, the latter approached her and, drawing up in front of her, touched his hat.

"Excuse me, miss. Are you the young lady for Yabsley Park?"

"Yes," gasped Dorothea, awed by the speaker's size and solemnity, "I am." She was on the point of giving her name, but did not know whether she should say "I am Dorothea Pomeroy," or "Miss Dorothea Pomeroy," so she said no more, and at that moment her guard broke away from the agitated gentleman and came toward her.

"Beg your pardon for not being here to look after you, missie, but I couldn't get away. Morning!"—to the footman—"this is the young lady for the Park. We've brought her safe so far. Now you put her into the carriage, and I'll see about her luggage. The luggage cart is here, I s'pose?" he called back as he hurried away. "Good morning, missie! I hope you'll be all right now."

## A Cottage Rose

But poor Dorothea was in a dreadful dilemma. She felt she could not possibly go away without saying a real 'good-bye' and 'thank you' to her friend—the only one she had now, or so it seemed to her. But what could she do? The footman was stalking away in one direction, and the guard in another, and, oh, what long legs they had, and how fast they walked! Well, she must do one thing or the other, and as the carriage would wait for her and the train would not, she turned and hurried after the guard. He had reached the luggage van before she came up with him.

"Please," she panted breathlessly, "I want to say good-bye." I was afraid I shouldn't see you again. Good-bye!"—holding out her hand shyly—"and—and thank you for coming and talking to me. I—I enjoyed it very much, and—oh, and thank you for promising to try and get me a rose cutting! I will be sure to remember," she added gravely. "Good-bye!"

The guard, carefully keeping all surprise out of his face, took the little hand held out to him and gripped it warmly. "Good-bye, missie, and I'll be sure to remember, too. I'm much obliged to you for the roses. Some day soon, p'r'aps, I'll have the pleasure of seeing you going up or down the line again. I shall be here till

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I'm moved, and that won't be yet awhile, I'm hoping."

Dorothea's pale face brightened. It was something to know that this friend would be not very far off each day. "I don't know if I shall be travelling often," she said in her grown-up fashion, "because I don't know anything about the ways where I am going to, but I hope I shall see you again soon. Thank you for taking care of me on the journey; you were very kind"; and with another "good-bye" she turned and hurried away.

Guard Jeffreys stood and looked after her with eyes very full of sympathy. "If that isn't a real little lady, then I've never seen one in all my days," he murmured. "Talks as old-fashioned and serious as a grandmother, she does, but she's got the heart of a child still. Poor little lady!"

Dorothea walked straight down the platform, past the porter and the gay flower-beds without seeing either, and so, without once looking back, out to the carriage waiting in the road beyond the white palings. Her lips were quivering, and tears were forcing their way up into her eyes again; but, she told herself firmly, she must not cry any more. She simply must not appear before her new relations with swelled eyelids and crimson face.

Some feeling that she could not have

## A Cottage Rose

explained made her anxious to be as great a credit as possible to her mother and her mother's people. And natural politeness made her feel that it might hurt the Pomeroy's feelings to see her disfigured with grief at coming to them. She did not want to begin with misunderstandings, and though she felt just now very nervous and forlorn and shy, she had really wanted to come to them.

As she approached the carriage she looked at it very anxiously, fully expecting to see her grandmother, or one of her other new relations, awaiting her in it. But there was no one, and though at the moment she felt something like relief, a little chilled feeling of neglect mingled with it.

The coachman on the box, and the footman holding open the door for her to enter, looked so big and so very important that they made her feel quite insignificant. As she approached they touched their hats so politely that she wondered if she ought to shake hands with them, or say 'Good afternoon!' However, she only smiled, for she was too shy to hold out her hand, and her lips were still so tremulous that she could not speak. Then the footman helped her in, placed the holland rug across her knees, her umbrella and handbag on the opposite seat, and with a bang of the door sprang lightly to his own seat beside the coachman, and in  
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## The Home of Her Fathers

another moment, after a good deal of prancing on the part of the plump, well-groomed horses, away they bowled in fine style.

Never in her life before had Dorothea known anything so luxurious and comfortable as were that carriage and that drive. For the first time since she could remember anything she was free to sit up or lean back, as she chose, to look about her as much as ever she liked, or even, should she care to, to lie down on the seat and close her eyes. There was no one to find fault, or say her nay; and revelling in the freedom, Dorothea forgot, in the joy of it, the little feeling of neglect which had chilled her at the start.

But, though she was tasting freedom for the first time, she did not do anything that even Miss Garland could have objected to. She just sat snugly back in one corner and gazed out at the country they were driving through, at the hedges starred with dog-roses, and fringed with meadow-sweet. How lovely it all was! Now and again they passed groups of cottages, and the people stepped to their doors to look at the carriage passing, and when they caught sight of the little occupant they stepped farther into the road and looked after her. Dorothea smiled friendlily at them all, and some of them smiled back at her; others were too much occupied with their thoughts to do anything



## A Cottage Rose

but stare, for a rumour had gone about that Mrs Pomeroy had a little grandchild coming to live with her, "poor Master John's little daughter." And as everyone had loved Master John, and grieved for his departure, and for the sorrow that had fallen upon his mother, they were anxious to see the little daughter who had come to make his old home hers.

So the carriage rolled on and on, carrying Dorothea through sunshine and smiles to her fate, and the thud of the horses' hoofs beat out an accompaniment to her thoughts.

The birds, singing so cheerfully on every side, reminded her of the birds she had left behind her. "I wonder what Aunt Julia is doing at this very minute," she thought; "and I wonder what the robin will think when he doesn't see me any more! And—oh, I wonder if the birds of one place fly to others a long way off, and tell each other about the things that happen! I wish the birds here would fly to Laburnum Cottage, and tell the robin that they have seen me. I do wish he too would come here to live. I am sure he would like it."

Butterflies flitted in every direction. They hovered over the hedges, and around the horses and even the carriage where Dorothea sat. Most of them were her favourite white ones, and the sight of them set her thinking. "Once a cabbage, always a cabbage,"

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Aunt Julia had said. "But they are very beautiful, and it seems to me," thought Dorothea, "that if anything is very beautiful it can't be unbeautiful because it is common. I believe it is only because they have such an ugly name that they are looked down upon. If there were only a few cabbage butterflies in the world, and they were called 'snow' butterflies, or something pretty like that, I am sure everyone would think them the most beautiful of all."

But Dorothea's thoughts were suddenly sent flying, for the horses were drawing up before a pair of iron gates, beside which stood one of the prettiest little round cottages Dorothea had ever seen. As she leaned forward to gaze at it, a woman came out of it and opened the gates, and as the horses trotted through she gazed at Dorothea with polite interest. Dorothea looked at her with interest too, and smiled. The woman curtsied as she returned the smile, and when she re-entered her home her face was still bright with it. "She's for all the world like poor Master John," she said to herself; "a smile and a word for everyone, he had. It's a good thing there's going to be some sunshine up at the house again."

The smile had faded, though, from Dorothea's face by that time, for already they were nearing the Manor, and the sight of it, so large and

## A Cottage Rose

imposing, and the thought of all the strangers within its walls, set her heart thumping heavily, and drove all the colour from her face. Then, with a beautiful sweeping swerve, the horses drew up, and there, under the great porch at the top of a flight of wide, shallow steps, Dorothea's frightened eyes saw a little gentle-faced lady standing alone.

The footman sprang down, and opening the carriage door, assisted Dorothea to alight, and, indeed, without assistance she could scarcely have managed it for nervousness. For a moment the little lady gazed at the forlorn little figure in evident surprise. "Did no one go to meet Miss Pomeroy?" she asked, and Dorothea thought her voice sounded almost as severe as Aunt Julia's.

"No, madam."

Dorothea stood hesitatingly by the carriage doorscarcely knowing what to do. Then, "Come, dear, come!" the same voice said to her, but in oh, so changed a tone!—and Dorothea mounted the steps as best she could.

She reached the top somehow, she never knew how, and then her grandmother's arms were round her, and kisses fell lovingly on the sad little face. "My darling child," said the same sweet voice, "welcome, welcome home at last!" And without realizing what she was doing, Dorothea, on the impulse of the moment,

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threw her arms round her grandmother's neck and returned her kisses as warmly as though she had known and loved her for years. Then, gently loosing her hold, Mrs Pomeroy took her little grandchild by the hand and led her into the house.

At first, coming in from the sunshine and brightness outside, Dorothea could distinguish but little of what was about her, but by degrees her dazzled eyes made out a large hall, high and spacious enough almost to have held Laburnum Cottage, and a staircase wide enough for four persons to walk abreast, and facing her, at the top of the first flight, a window like a church window, full of richly-coloured glass.

But before she could take in any more, her grandmother's voice drew her attention again. "Wilson," she was saying, "this is my granddaughter, Miss Dorothea—Master John's little daughter." And Dorothea, turning, saw a stout, dignified-looking old man in black bowing before her. "She is coming to live with us."

"And very glad, ma'am, we shall all be."

"I am sure we shall, Wilson—if she is anything like her dear father," Mrs. Pomeroy added softly.

"Yes'm, indeed!"

"Did—Wilson know my father?" asked Dorothea eagerly, as she and her grandmother mounted the wide staircase together. She was

## A Cottage Rose

so used to receiving a snub in answer to any questions she asked that she felt quite surprised when she did not get one.

"Yes, dear; Wilson has been with us for forty years, first as footman, then as butler. He is a dear and valued friend; he—he loved your dear father." And the old lady stopped on the stairs and kissed her grandchild again.

"I am so glad Wilson knew him," said Dorothea, speaking her thoughts aloud. "P'r'aps he will tell me about him one day. I have never——" she stopped abruptly, colouring with embarrassment. She had been going to say, "I have never had any one to tell me about Father and Mother," but suddenly remembered why, and she blushed almost guiltily as some of the things she had heard fall from Garland and Baxter lips came pouring into her mind. Their remarks seemed doubly insulting now in the presence of this gentle, dainty little lady.

"I—I am afraid I cannot tell you anything of your mother," her grandmother was saying, and seemed embarrassed in her turn. "I—I never saw her, but," she added kindly, "we will have many talks about your dear father and his earlier days. I—I should like you to hear our side of the story, Dorothea. I daresay you have only heard the other."

"I have never heard either," said Dorothea



## The Home of Her Fathers

in a trembling voice ; “ I—I have only heard little things that—that people said sometimes when they forgot I was there. Aunt Julia never told me anything—or—or—let me ask about Father and Mother—and, oh, I do want to know about them ! ”

“ Had she come to another place,” she asked herself despairingly, “ where she must never mention her mother ? ” How very difficult life was ! But at that moment, as though she had read her little granddaughter’s sad thoughts, her grandmother raised her hot little hand and drew it very tenderly through her arm. “ My poor child,” she said kindly, “ I wish—we had known her.” And then she added, as though to herself, “ it might have been better for us all.”

But just then they drew up before an open door, and Dorothea’s thoughts were sent flying in another direction.

“ This is your room, darling,” said her Granny, looking down at her with smiling, eager eyes. “ Do you think you will like it ? ”

“ Like it ! ” For a moment Dorothea could not speak ; she could only gaze with wide eyes full of delight. Then, “ Oh ! ” she gasped, recovering her wits a little, “ Oh, Granny ! how lovely, how perfectly lovely—it—it can’t really be for me ! ”

Mrs Pomeroy laughed, well pleased at the



## A Cottage Rose

child's delight. "Yes, dear, it is all for you. Your very own room. It was your father's when he was a boy. It has never been used since—but I wish you to have it—my dear son's own little girl—it will seem almost like having him again. Oh, Dorothea," she cried, with sudden longing in her voice, "I wish—I wish that you remembered him, that you might tell me about him in those years after he was lost to me!"

"Oh, I wish I could," cried Dorothea. "I often wish I could remember him, and I have tried and tried to, but I was only two years old when he died." Then they entered the room and Dorothea gazed about her, fascinated. "Were those his books, Granny?" pointing to some rather shabby volumes on a shelf by the fireplace.

"Yes, darling, and these are his pictures; he loved them all. And on the window ledge is his name, which he carved in the wood-work."

"Oh! I must see that," cried Dorothea, springing to the window. "Was he scolded, Granny, for doing it?" she asked anxiously, looking up from the roughly carved letters with eyes which were so like his own that his mother's eyes filled with tears.

"Yes, dear, I fear he was."

"But I am glad now that he did it, aren't you,

## The Home of Her Fathers

Granny? It makes him seem so—so real, doesn't it?—as if a little bit of him was still here. I wish," she thought, "I had carved my name on my window-sill at Aunt Julia's," but she kept this wish to herself.

Her Granny's eyes brightened. "It does, dear. Whenever I look at those letters I see him again as he looked up at me that day, his cheeks flushed, his eyes sparkling with mischief. The mischief did not die out of them even when he was punished, and when I went in as usual to say good-night to him he was still unrepentant.

"'Never mind, Mother darling,' he said naughtily; 'when I am famous you will show those letters to everyone with all the pride in the world, and in a century or two my descendants will be brought here to gaze at them while they listen to the story of the great and good John Darell Pomeroy who carved them; and Americans will pour in at half-a-crown a head to look, and they will chip off bits of the wood to take away as a mementoes. And Hugh's great-great-grandson, when he comes into the property, will be able to keep a pack of hounds on what he makes out of the entrance fees. He'll be jolly grateful to me, at any rate!'"

Dorothea laughed softly. "Poor Daddy!" she said, and her grandmother started perceptibly.

## A Cottage Rose

She had never heard her boy called by that tender little name before, and it made her heart thrill.

Scanning everything with eagerness, Dorothea moved about the room almost as though she were in some sacred place. "Was this his bed? Was this his table?" she asked, as she flitted from thing to thing.

"Yes, dear."

"He must have been very happy here."

"He was; he had a very happy boyhood. I am always glad to remember that."

Dorothea, tired at last, dropped wearily on to the broad window seat. "I think I shall be very happy, too," she said gravely. "It is a lovely room—too lovely for me. I don't think I ought to have it, Grandmother."

It was not a very large room, nor was it very elaborately furnished. The little brass bed was bare of any trimming save the snowy valance; the furniture was white and quite plain, but the walls were covered with a pretty green paper the colour of a sage bush, and the soft, thick carpet matched the walls. White and green curtains shaded the window, which now stood wide open to the sunshine and the sweet air. Beyond the window lay a square garden with borders ablaze with flowers. It was still called 'the children's garden,' and on the grass stood a swing.

## The Home of Her Fathers

"This other room," said Mrs Pomeroy presently, stepping through an open door into a room beyond, "is to be your sitting-room and workroom. You will do your lessons here, and practise. I have had the schoolroom piano done up and put here."

"Another room!" Dorothea gasped again. "Oh, Granny!—it is too pretty to work in," she said in an awed voice; "I am afraid I shall always be staring about me!"

"You will grow accustomed to it, dear."

"Shall I?" asked Dorothea, but doubtfully, as her eyes took in the blue walls, the blue carpets, the little writing-table with all its dainty fittings, the comfortable, pretty chairs, the bookcase full of books, and, almost the most fascinating of all, the French window opening on to a balcony. The two rooms, being quite at the corner of the house, had two entirely different views. This one looked out on the park and the winding drive.

"Granny," said Dorothea, almost tearful, "I—I don't know what to say; it—it seems too much—just for me; and—and you don't know yet how naughty I am—sometimes! Aunt Julia says——"

Her grandmother put her arm round her and drew her close. "Never mind what—what your aunt says. All you have to do now, dear, is to be a joy and pleasure to us here, to look

## A Cottage Rose

on this as your real home, and—and forget that you have ever lived in any other. Now go and take off your hat and coat and prepare for tea. I am having it in my boudoir. Look, dear, that is my boudoir door. Come to me there when you are ready. You see I am very near you."

"Yes, Grandmamma," said Dorothea docilely, but the joy had gone out of her voice. Her grandmother's words had fallen like a shadow where all before had been sunshine.

"This is your real—your only home ; forget that you have ever lived in any other."

"I can't," thought Dorothea wistfully, "I can't"; and she fingered the little chip she had brought from her own window-sill. "And—and I don't want to!" And as she turned back into her room there was a mist before her eyes which blotted out all the beauty and the sunshine.

## CHAPTER VII

### AUNT ISABEL

Beautiful hands are those that do  
Work that is earnest, brave and true,  
Moment by moment the long day through.

E. P. ALLERTON

**W**HEN Dorothea went back into her bedroom she found her box already there, and a maid waiting to open it.

"May I have the key, miss?" she asked, smiling good-temperedly. "I expect you'll be glad to have your brushes and shoes taken out at once."

"Yes, I do want them," said Dorothea shyly; "but I will——" Then she drew herself up. What she wanted to say was, "I will unpack my things myself," but she did not like to. She was afraid it would sound ungracious. So she bravely bore with a stranger handling and scrutinizing her belongings, and almost before Dorothea had taken off her hat and coat and scarf, the box was unpacked and most of the contents were arranged in their new home.

"How sweet your roses do smell, miss!"



## A Cottage Rose

said Mary, as Dorothea unpinning them from her coat. "I couldn't think where the beautiful scent was coming from."

"They do, don't they?" Dorothea's face brightened at once. "But I am afraid they are nearly dead."

"I expect they'll revive in warm water, miss. I'll get some for them when I've unbuttoned your boots."

"Thank you," said Dorothea gratefully. "I want to keep them alive as long as ever I can."

She thought she should like Mary, she was so kind.

"I love those roses, miss, don't you? Though people do call them common, I always say I'd rather have one of those than a dozen of any other kind. The smell carries me right away to my home."

"How strange it is," thought Dorothea, "everyone calls them common, yet everyone loves them!" Aloud she asked politely, "Would you like one? I haven't many; I gave the guard a few. He likes them too. I am sorry they are so faded."

"Oh, thank you, miss, I should love one! I never see any like them now." The girl took the half-dead flower from Dorothea's hand with as much pleasure as if it had been a handsome gift, and sniffed at it delightedly. "Shall I

## Aunt Isabel

brush your hair for you, miss, and help you put on your pinafore ? ”

But Dorothea was too shy to appreciate such attentions. “ Oh, no, thank you ! ” she said nervously ; “ I can manage. I’ve been able to dress myself for years now.” And Mary went smiling away and left her.

A few minutes later, though, Dorothea almost wished she had accepted her offer. Her hair was so tangled, and so dusty, she thought she never would get it shiny and smooth as Aunt Julia expected always to see it. However, she made herself look as nice as she could, and with a new pinafore over her new dress, and a new handkerchief in her pocket, she felt very smart and ‘ Sundayfied ’ as she made her way along the corridor to her grandmother’s room and tapped at the door.

As she turned the handle she heard the sound of voices within the room and hesitated, afraid lest she might be intruding. One voice was loud and excusing, the other gently reproachful.

“ But you promised me you would go, Isabel.”

“ I know I did, but—well, Mother, I simply could not spare the time. I would have sent Edwards, but she had to finish my dress for me to wear at the Howard’s party to-night, and she could not possibly have done it if she had had to go to the station ; and after all——”

## A Cottage Rose

“But you promised, Isabel!—Oh, here is Dorothea! Come over to me, dear, and be introduced to your Aunt Isabel.”

Dorothea went over and stood shyly by her grandmother's chair. Already she felt as though she knew her, but the golden-haired little lady in the bright pink gown, with jewels sparkling on her hands and wrists, in her ears and at her throat, filled her with awe and embarrassment. She did not know which she ought to do, kiss her aunt, or merely shake hands with her. She felt she should do one or the other; but as the lady showed no desire to do either, Dorothea checked herself, and merely said, “How do you do, Aunt Isabel?” in as polite a manner as she knew.

Mrs Halford, however, apparently did not hear, or, at any rate, she did not answer, and Dorothea's formal little speech seemed—to her, at least—to echo and echo through the room, and ring in her ears embarrassingly, until at last her aunt, who had seemed to be taking no notice of her, but was all the time studying her intently, remarked criticizingly, and as though Dorothea had no sense or hearing, “She is like the Pomeroy's; that is one mercy.”

The tone and the words hurt Dorothea cruelly, and roused her to hot anger. Her mother, she was sure, was quite as pretty as Mrs Halford herself, and certainly more kind-looking. For a  
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## Aunt Isabel

moment, in her indignation, she wished she had been a Garland through and through. She longed passionately to be like her mother, and she certainly longed to be treated as she would have treated a lonely little girl thrown entirely among strangers.

Before her death, Dorothea's mother had written her own motto inside the cover of her baby daughter's Bible: "Do unto others as you would they should do unto you." Dorothea remembered it now as she tried to choke back her indignation.

Mrs Halford's voice broke in on Dorothea's thoughts. "She will be tall, I think," she remarked, still studying Dorothea as she would a piece of furniture, and quite as careless of her feelings.

"Mother was tall," burst out Dorothea, unable to keep silent any longer. Her voice trembled, partly with anger, partly with daring, but she could not keep her tongue from speaking. She felt it would have been disloyal to her mother's memory to say nothing. "Aunt Julia is very tall too—all the Garlands are."

"Indeed!" It was the first word her aunt had spoken to her, and it would have been hard to have made it more icy or unpleasant. Then, while Dorothea blushed scarlet to the roots of her hair, Mrs Halford turned to her mother again.

## A Cottage Rose

"When she is properly dressed she will be quite presentable and nice—that is, if ordinary good taste is shown in choosing her clothes."

Mrs Pomeroy busied herself with the tea-cups; her hands were shaking, her face disturbed and anxious. She sympathized with poor Dorothea undergoing such a trial, and Mrs Halford's want of good feeling distressed her.

"I like Dorothea in her neat brown frock and nice white pinafore," she said gently. "I don't care to see children dressed in the extravagant fashions of the present day. She looks a neat and dainty little lady. What more can one wish? Come, dear," smiling across at her little granddaughter with kindly eyes, "come over here and sit by me. I am sure you must want your tea after your hot journey."

Dorothea, her cheeks still flushed, her eyes still flashing, went over to the chair her grandmother pointed out to her and sat down. "Oh," she thought, feeling very miserable, "I do wish people would be as proud of being kind and forgiving as they are of being unkind and unforgiving; then Mother and Daddy would have been quite, quite happy, and Aunt Julia too, and perhaps Granny; and, oh, how happy I should be!"

"If Gray gives her some good riding lessons, and she has dancing lessons too, and drill, she will soon learn to hold herself better," Mrs  
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## Aunt Isabel

Halford's voice broke in again. "Tall children do grow so gawky if they don't learn to carry themselves properly. Can you ride, Dorothea?"

"No," said Dorothea nervously, "I have never been on a horse."

Mrs Halford tossed her head impatiently. "I expect we shall find she has as much to learn as to unlearn."

Mrs Pomeroy laid her hand caressingly on her little granddaughter's. "I hope she will never learn to be anything but my dear, unaffected little girl!" she said tenderly. "We must go slowly, Isabel. Everything is new to her; we must not attempt too much at once."

Mrs Halford tossed her head again, but she only remarked that in her opinion the best plan would be to send Dorothea to a good school at once, for there she would have drill instructors and dancing masters, and everything else that she needed, whereas it would be impossible to get them all to come so far for only one pupil.

"But I want my little girl with me," cried Mrs Pomeroy pathetically. "I cannot give her up at once, after waiting all this time to get her. I would like, too, to have her educated under my own eye. As long as she walks well, and carries herself as a lady should, we can do without drilling and exercises." But Mrs Halford had become absorbed in a new fashion paper, and was no longer interested.



## A Cottage Rose

"Dorothea, do you take sugar?" asked her Granny, turning to her again with a tender smile.

"Yes, please," said Dorothea, trying to smile in return.

It was the first time she had taken tea in any other way than sitting up to a table, with a place laid for each person, and she felt nervous and uncomfortable. It was so very difficult to hold her cup steadily in one hand and her cake in the other, and not drop crumbs or upset her tea. She would not have minded it so much if Aunt Isabel had not been there, but to feel that she was criticizing all that she said and did, made Dorothea so nervous, she would rather have gone without any tea, greatly though she needed it.

Her Granny, presently seeing her dilemma, made a place for her at the table, and bade her draw her chair close, and after that all might have gone comfortably but for Mrs Halford. With her mind more at ease, Dorothea was really enjoying the dainty cakes, of which there were so many kinds, the delicate sandwiches, and the nice creamy tea. It was all so tempting and dainty after the thick bread and butter, the plain, dry cake and watery tea she had always known at Laburnum Cottage, and Dorothea loved dainty, pretty things.

"How strange it is," she was thinking,

## Aunt Isabel

“that different people do the same kind of thing in such different ways; and I suppose everybody thinks his own way the right way. When I have my cottage I shall have——” But her plans were suddenly scattered to the winds by a sudden shrill scream from the lips of her aunt.

“Why, my dear child, whatever is the matter with your hands? Mother, darling, do look at them! They are quite disfigured and stained, and—oh, they are a shocking sight! Have you been in the habit of doing rough work or gardening, Dorothea?”

Dorothea started so violently that the cake she was about to lift to her mouth fell to the floor instead. “My—hands?” she stammered, bewildered by the suddenness of the attack. “Aren’t they clean? I—I washed them as well as I could”—the colour sweeping over face and neck at the mere thought.

“I daresay they are what you call clean,” retorted Mrs Halford; “but they are so stained, so disfigured—and look at the state of your nails! They could not be worse if you did the dirtiest of work.”

“I—did do housework and gardening,” said Dorothea courageously, but hiding the offending hands in her lap. She wished she could hide herself entirely. “I liked to,” she added with even more courage. “I—I couldn’t

## A Cottage Rose

get all the stains off at once, but—I will soon.”

“Isabel,” pleaded Granny’s soft voice, “don’t worry the child. You quite upset her, and me too, by shrieking out so suddenly. It is a dear, kind little hand, I know”—taking one of Dorothea’s in her own and holding it tight—“and—and if there was rough work to be done, it is all to her credit that she did it willingly. Dorothea is not to blame. Her dear father loved gardening and carpentering, and his hands were almost always stained with paint or tar, and—I loved them all the more dearly for it,” said Granny in a voice that quavered. “A stain on the hand is nothing—if there is no stain on heart or soul!” she added, a note of reproach in her voice, and something even more than reproach. But what it was Dorothea could not understand.

“Do you remember, Isabel, how, when you were children, I taught you that it is not the stains that show which really matter, but those that are there but do not show—those that cannot be seen by us but are plain enough to the eyes of God? We seem to think that stains do not matter as long as our fellow-creatures do not see them.”

Mrs Halford tossed her head impatiently. “You say so many quaint things, Mamma, I really can’t remember them all.” But Dorothea

## Aunt Isabel

would remember this one to her life's end. The idea appealed to her, her thoughts clung about it. Some words came to her mind—words she had often read, but had never seen the beauty and meaning of till now: "To keep himself unspotted from the world." At Aunt Julia's she had been taken to church twice every Sunday, and on Sunday afternoons she had been expected to read a chapter of the Bible and a hymn, but the chapter had been chosen haphazard, and read without interest. The Bible had never been read to her as real history, as the most beautiful story the world has ever known. Here and there a parable had fascinated her; here and there she had found a verse that seemed to her beautiful or interesting; but nothing had ever been explained, nor held any real meaning for her. Now suddenly this line appeared to her in a new light, and she began to understand.

"It—it seems so real," she thought to herself, "and—and as if it is meant for me, too. It makes me feel like a Crusader, or a knight in shining armour!" And a vague desire filled her to be good and noble, to do things that would help other people and make them happy. She wanted to be useful, and to keep herself without stain on mind or soul. Though she did not know it, and would not have known how to express it, her poor little heart was

## A Cottage Rose

filled with the longing to be wanted by somebody, to be of so much use to somebody that they would feel they could not do without her.

Her thoughts carried her so far away that she forgot where she was and all that was happening around her. Talk was going on, but she was deaf to everything until she was roused by her grandmother saying, loudly and distinctly, "Dorothea, are you asleep, dear? I was asking you if you have some cool cotton dresses and summer clothes?"

Dorothea came out of her dream-world in some confusion. It was difficult to change back suddenly from a knight in shining armour to a little girl in a heavy countrified frock.

"I have this dress, and my best one—my best is just like this, only purple. Then I have my blue serge for mornings; it was my best," she added hastily; "it is quite good. This and the purple one are new."

"Have you no thin silk or cotton ones?" broke in Mrs Halford.

"Silk!" Dorothea had never had a silk dress in her life. She had never heard of little girls wearing such things. Aunt Julia had a black silk dress which she wore at church sometimes, and changed as soon as she got home, but she was thirty before she had it, and she had saved for it for years—as she

## Aunt Isabel

had impressed on Dorothea many and many a time.

Mrs Halford tossed her head impatiently. "Yes, silk—washing-silk," she cried. "Haven't you ever heard of it before, child?"

"No," said Dorothea simply, and her aunt tossed her head again in great scorn.

"One would think she had been brought up among savages," she exclaimed irritably. "It is useless to discuss such things as clothes with her; she simply does not know what one is talking about. I will go to the shops myself and get her something presentable."

"Dorothea had better go with you; she will need to have her things tried on. You will be better able to judge, too, what suits her." But though Mrs Halford agreed to the arrangement, Dorothea could see that she was not pleased with it, and, indeed, she shrank from it herself.

"I wish Granny would come too," she thought dismally as she went back to her rooms when tea was done. "I daresay it will be very nice to have some more new clothes, and prettier ones, but—I would rather go without them than go shopping with Aunt Isabel."

Yet who could feel dismal in the face of such possessions as Dorothea opened the door upon? Through the west window of her pretty sitting-room the sun poured in cheerfully on her little



## A Cottage Rose

piano, her writing-table, on cosy chairs and comfortable couch, on flowers, books, pictures. "Oh, I can't, I can't believe it is all for me!" she cried. "It seems too much all at once. I'm afraid I'll wake up presently and find it is all nothing but imaginings." Her eyes fell on the bookcase in the corner. She had never possessed a book in her life, nor read a real story-book, and with a cry of rapture she dropped on the floor before the shelves. With eager fingers she pulled out one volume after another, glancing at the pictures here, reading a page or a paragraph there, unable to decide which to choose. She was lost to everyone and everything in the world in her new delight.

"Dorothea, dear, have you written to your aunt to tell her you have arrived safely?"

The book she had been holding fell with a bang to the floor as Dorothea sprang hurriedly to her feet. "Oh, I quite forgot! I was reading. I am so sorry. What can I do, Grandmamma? Have I missed the post?"

"Yes, dear, it is too late now to begin to write. Your supper will be ready in a minute or two. Never mind, I will send a telegram, and you can write to-morrow. Your aunt would know you would be tired; she would scarcely expect——"

"But I am not tired," cried truthful Dorothea, full of remorse. "I began to read—and I

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## Aunt Isabel

forgot. I could have done it—and Aunt Julia will be expecting to hear—I mean, I think she would like to. I—I think she will feel a little bit lonely at first. You see she hadn't anyone for company but me."

Dorothea's eyes were full of tears, for her heart felt very sad for the aunt who seemed to have become separated from her by much more than mere miles ; and for the rest of the evening, in spite of all the nice things surrounding her, she was very thoughtful and sad.

"Do you think you will be happy here, my darling?" her grandmother asked her anxiously as she kissed her good-night.

"Oh, yes, Granny, I couldn't help it, you are so kind to me!" And she kissed the soft old cheek with all the warmth of her pent-up feelings. Yet in her dainty bed in her beautiful room she cried herself to sleep, thinking of that other bare, unlovely room of hers, where the roses nodded in at the windows, unnoticed now by anyone, and of the cold, stern aunt, alone in the ugly, dull brown house.

## CHAPTER VIII

### LIFE AT YABSLEY PARK

When hard word of jest and scorn  
Is the trial to be borne,  
He Who felt their bitter sting  
Knows thy secret suffering.  
He will sooth and succour thee ;  
" As thy days thy strength shall be."

E. R. V.

**I**T is very disappointing," sighed Dorothea the next day. " You long and long for something, and you think how lovely it would be to have it, and then when it comes it is not a half, nor a quarter, as nice as you thought it would be."

She had often gone shopping with Miss Julia Garland, but that had only made her feel how very, very nice it would be to go shopping with someone else, someone who liked the pretty things she liked herself, and someone who would not snub the people who served her, as Aunt Julia did all the time.

Yet now that she really was shopping with someone who did like pretty things, and pretty things only, and who was quite nice and pleasant to those who served her, Dorothea did not find

## Life at Yabsley Park

the experience as delightful as she had imagined it would be, not even though the pretty things bought were all for herself.

Aunt Isabel was very generous, and spared no trouble in getting what she thought would best suit her new niece. Indeed, Dorothea felt quite shocked at all the trouble that was being taken for her, and at all the money that she was costing, but her aunt was very outspoken too, and not flattering in her remarks.

"She is very tall for her age, and lanky," she said to one of the assistants, "and her complexion is so very colourless it will be difficult to choose colours that will suit her. Dorothea, don't poke your head so! If you would but try to keep your shoulders back you would not look so dreadfully gawky. My dear child, don't hang your arms as though they were about to drop off! It is so ungraceful!"—until poor Dorothea was so mortified and confused, she scarcely knew what to do with herself. Indeed, she felt more inclined to cry than anything.

"Oh, if only they would do to me as they would like people to do to them!" she thought wistfully.

"Do please give her a hat to wear home," Mrs Halford's voice broke in. "That hideous black thing that she wore makes me quite ill. I really cannot be seen with her again in

## A Cottage Rose

it. It is more suitable for an elderly cook than for a child."

Mrs Halford, who evidently knew the milliner quite well, spoke more in jest than earnest, but Dorothea did not know that, and her lips quivered with the pain the mocking words brought her. She had not liked the hat herself when it was bought, but in the new tenderness she felt for her aunt the sneers hurt her cruelly. She thought of all the money Miss Julia had spent on her, of her satisfaction with her purchases, and her pleasure as she thought how impressed Dorothea's relations would be by the quality and size of her outfit. And all they did was to scorn it, and get her another as soon as possible.

'Madame Violet' placed hat after hat on Dorothea's head before any met with Mrs Halford's approval—white hats, blue hats, pink, green, violet, trimmed and untrimmed.

"That Leghorn will do for one," she said at last, "if it is trimmed with chiffon and a large white feather; and I will have one of those muslin ones—she is not too old for it, is she?"

"Oh, no, madam; the young lady will look a picture in it."

But Dorothea did not want to look a picture. She wanted something pretty but simple. She could not bear to be all frills and furbelows; they made her feel over-dressed and uncomfortable.

## Life at Yabsley Park

"Aunt Isabel," she ventured at last, despairing as she saw one elaborate hat after another being brought out for her to try on, "don't you think those are very pretty?" pointing to a large show-case which stood back against the wall—one they had not looked at closely.

Mrs Halford went over to the case and examined the contents critically. "Yes," she agreed. "Yes, I like those; they are charmingly simple. If they suit you they will be quite right."

"The little lady's taste is excellent," said Madame politely as she placed one of the hats on Dorothea's head; "and how perfectly it suits her!"

After a moment's study of hat and wearer, Mrs Halford agreed. "Yes, I think it does. Do you like it, Dorothea?"

It was a plain fine straw, simply trimmed with a thick ruche of blue ribbon, the two wide-fringed ends of which rested on the brim. Dorothea liked it very much, and said so.

"She shall wear it home; and as the blue coat needs no alteration she can wear that too; and, oh! do give her some gloves to wear—white ones. Her frock?—Oh, I suppose I must put up with that for the time, unless you can find one to fit her well enough to wear at once."

However, Madam found her a white frock, and



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Dorothea, coming face to face with herself in a long mirror as she walked out of the shop, did not recognize herself in the dainty blue-and-white maiden looking out at her from the glass. Her light, well-cut clothes made her look taller and slimmer ; her new brown shoes made her feet quite shapely ; her hair, which had already been shampooed by her aunt's hairdresser, rippled over her blue coat like burnished brass. For a moment she looked at herself shyly, awed but pleased.

" And the clothes she has taken off, madam, they shall be sent to the Manor this afternoon," said Madame Violet politely.

But Mrs Halford threw out her hands in protest. " Oh, no, no ! Don't send them back, I beg of you. Perhaps you know some poor woman who would be glad of them."

This was more than Dorothea could bear. She forgot all about herself and her becoming new raiment, and flew to her aunt.

" Oh, Aunt Isabel, please—please let them be sent home. Don't give them away!" she begged earnestly ; and Mrs Halford, thinking it the easiest way out of the difficulty, consented.

By this time they had reached the waiting carriage. " Now, Dorothea, get in—oh, dear me, child, don't you even know how to get into a carriage ? Surely you must realize that there is a right way and a wrong ! "



"DON'T GIVE THEM AWAY!"



## Life at Yabsley Park

"No," said Dorothea meekly, "I didn't." But in her heart she wondered why, if there were two ways of doing things, she always happened to choose the wrong way, and she did wish the shop-woman had not been there to see her do it. But Aunt Isabel was showing her which foot to put on the step first, and explaining why and on which side of the carriage she should take her seat, so she had no time to think of anything else, and the lesson was such a long one, it lasted nearly the whole way home.

When they had passed inside the lodge gates they found Mrs Pomeroy being driven about the park in the sunshine, and both got down to join her.

"You look like a flower in your pretty clothes," she said, gazing at her little granddaughter with pleased, approving eyes. "Do you like them yourself, dear?"

Dorothea blushed rosy red, for she could not help feeling pleased. It was the first time in her life that she had had a compliment paid her. "Oh, yes, Granny, thank you!" she cried delightedly; "and I have such lovely clothes coming. I did not know that such pretty things were made—and—and I can hardly believe they are all for me."

"I am so glad you like them, dear. And you think you will be happy here?" Again the

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same anxious question ; and again Dorothea repeated, " Oh, yes, Granny, I could not help being happy," while beneath the wide brim of her pretty hat her blue eyes glowed with gratitude and content.

" It is a great pleasure to us to see her happy, is it not, Isabel ? "

" Yes," answered Mrs Halford absently, her thoughts evidently far away. " I think it is time for you to go in, Mamma. It must be nearly luncheon-time."

" I told Berry to drive me about until a quarter to two. One wants to enjoy the fine weather as much as one can. I sleep so much better for being out of doors ; but if you think it is time to go in, will you tell him to turn the pony ? I expect you are tired with your long morning's shopping."

" Oh, I am fearfully tired," said Mrs Halford in an injured tone. So Berry was told to turn at once, and the whole party hurried back to the house.

" As soon as you have had your lunch, Dorothea," said her Granny, as Dorothea was about to run upstairs, " you had better write to your aunt before you do anything else."

" I think she should write to her just once," she added as Dorothea ran on her way—she spoke to her daughter almost apologetically—" and then the connexion can cease."

## Life at Yabsley Park

"I really fail to see why she should write at all." Mrs Halford's clear, haughty voice rang out distinctly through hall and stairs and up to Dorothea. "The woman can expect no consideration from you—none whatever; she has never done anything but insult you—the common, insolent creature! Dorothea should be made to forget her as soon as possible."

If she wished her to forget, that was not the way to make her, and so Mrs Halford should have known. As the insulting words reached her, Dorothea's heart leapt with pain and anger, and a greater love for her Aunt Julia sprang into being than she had ever felt in her life before.

"How dare she! How dare she call anyone insolent when she is so insolent herself—so—so rude! Forget Aunt Julia! I never, never will forget her. I'll love her more! I'll—I'll write to her often—if only to spite Aunt Isabel! I'd rather have Aunt Julia than her a thousand times! Common—insolent! If Aunt Julia is common, then I'm common, and I won't stay here to be looked down upon, and I won't take their clothes. I—I won't take anything; I hate it all—and I hate Aunt Isabel most, and—and I will only wear the clothes Aunt Julia bought for me!" Snatching off her pretty hat she flung it across the room;



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the blue coat went flying after it, and then, quite overcome, Dorothea flung herself face downward on the floor and burst into an agony of tears.

In her grief she had not heard her grandmother's gentle reply: "But she loves the child, Isabel. She has taken care of her all these years, and just think what it must have cost her to part with her! I have no reason to like or consider Miss Garland, but I can't help feeling very, very sorry for her. She must be a brave and self-denying woman to have spared the child to me."

"Let her suffer!" retorted Mrs Halford angrily. "It is only fair that she should. Let her be lonely. Remember how lonely you were all those years without John."

Mrs Pomeroy shrank before the cruelty of the speech, and her face grew white. "That was not Julia Garland's fault," she answered sternly. "There were others who were much more blameworthy." And, withdrawing her arm from her daughter's, she entered her own room and shut the door, leaving Mrs Halford, looking ashamed and uncomfortable, without.

The clock striking in the turret brought Dorothea back to the present, and to her feet. In half an hour she would have to go to the dining-room. What was she looking like? What would they think? She crossed to the

## Life at Yabsley Park

glass and looked at her disfigured face. "Oh!" she gasped, and pouring some water into the basin, sponged her eyes vigorously. After that she changed her shoes, and put on a clean pinafore. By the time she had done that her determination to change back into Aunt Julia's purchases had weakened considerably, and at the thought of the storm there would be when she appeared in the dining-room in them, it fled altogether. She felt she could not face her grandmother's disapproval and disappointment and her aunt's sarcastic remarks. She simply could not. But though she did not change her frock, it was a very changed Dorothea, in every other respect, who presently took her seat at the luncheon table. To her Granny's loving smile she made no response, but sat grave and silent through the meal, while Mrs Pomeroy noted with surprise and pain the reddened lids and downcast face. She wondered anxiously what had happened to cause such grief, but knowing how severe Mrs Halford's comments would be, she wisely refrained from any remark.

"Perhaps the excitement has been too much for her," she thought sympathetically, little dreaming of the real cause; and to draw Mrs Halford's attention from Dorothea she drew her into a discussion of her own future plans. Mrs Halford was going back to India in a week

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or two, to rejoin her husband after a long holiday at home, so there was a great deal to discuss, and Dorothea was thankful not to be talked at, or about; and she gave a big sigh of relief when at last the meal was ended, and she was able to escape to her own room and fasten the door behind her.

And, oh, what a comfort it was to have such a place to fly to! Such a sanctuary! Even in her pain and anger she felt that. It was a comfort she had never known before. At Laburnum Cottage she had a bedroom to herself, but she was not allowed to sit in it by day, and at night she had to leave her door open until Miss Garland went to bed and shut it. If she had attempted to lock herself in her own room there would have been no end to the mischief her aunt would have accused her of.

Now, as she looked about her and realized the loving care that had been lavished in making these beautiful rooms ready for her, her bitterness of heart died away a good deal. She seated herself at her writing-table, and her eyes travelled over the dainty fittings, the pretty pink silk blotter, the silver inkstand, the pen-tray full of pens and pencils, the stamp-box, the box of coloured wax, and the silver seal—all put there for her use alone by the loving grandmother for whom, as yet, she had done nothing.

## Life at Yabsley Park

She buried her face in her hands. "Oh, I am mean, ungrateful—but she said such things, such cruel things!" The pain came surging back again, the wound ached still. How could she write a letter with her thoughts in such a whirl? She rose from the table and wandered across to the window. Anger, questionings, doubts, raced and chased each other through her brain. "Why had it hurt her more to hear her aunt called common than to hear her called insolent, or hateful? Perhaps it was because she was accustomed to hearing the two last words freely used. The Baxters and the Garlands had spoken often of the Pomeroy's as insolent, hateful—but never as common.

The question was one that had puzzled wiser heads than Dorothea's. A white butterfly fluttered past her window, and alighted on a spray of honeysuckle near by. "That is a 'cabbage,' " said Dorothea, her mind diverted for a moment, and her thoughts went back, faster than any butterfly or bird could travel, to the prim garden and the butterflies and robins there.

"And Aunt Julia called the butterflies common, and Aunt Isabel called Aunt Julia common, yet they aren't the least bit alike. I wonder what makes some common and others not, and how people know which is which! Oh, dear, it is all very puzzling! But common things

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can be very beautiful," she wound up with a deep sigh of relief, "and it can't be so very dreadful to be common if you can be very sweet, and beautiful, and loved by lots of people as my little roses are."

Then she suddenly remembered the letter she had to write, and seated herself at her writing-table again. "If I don't begin at once it will be tea-time before the letter is finished, and then I shall miss the post again—and Aunt Julia will think I don't care."

As she began to use her new possessions her delight in them increased. From the well-filled paper rack she first selected a sheet of paper, then she examined the three penholders in the pen-tray; one was of cork, one of silver, and a third of mother-of-pearl. The mother-of-pearl one was the prettiest, she thought, so she chose that. Then she wrote the date. So far all was very easy.

The paper had the address stamped on it, and the name of the station—Dorothea thought that very grand. "But I am afraid it will make Aunt Julia cross," she sighed. It took so very little to make Aunt Julia cross. In her imagination she could hear her say: "The idea of giving such notepaper to a child to write on! They don't seem to know how to make show enough. I call it ignorant pride, and nothing else!" Dorothea's letter would

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be forgotten in her indignation against the paper it was written on.

At the recollection of Miss Garland's harshness, Dorothea's feelings toward her lost some of their pity and tenderness. There was no other paper to use, so she must use that, whether Miss Garland objected to it or not. So she squared her elbows and began to write in her very best hand.

"My dear Aunt Julia——" That was easy enough, as long as she remembered to make her down-strokes dark and her up-strokes light. But what could she say next? Her desire to write grew rapidly less and less, for the letter seemed to be very difficult of accomplishment. It was so hard to think of something to say, something that would not give offence or cause a sneer. In her mind she turned over many sentences.

"'I am writing to tell you that I arrived here safely.' No, that would not do. Aunt Julia would only remark, 'Well, she couldn't have written if she hadn't. I think I've sense enough to know that!'" Dorothea began again: "'This is to let you know I had a pleasant——' How does one spell pleasant? Oh, dear, how difficult spelling is!"

She began once more. "'This is to let you know I had a nice journey, and am very well, and——' Oh, I'd better not say happy!"



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Aunt Julia will think I have forgotten her already."

After a little more deep thinking she took up her pen again. "'And I hope to feel at home soon. The guard of the train was a very nice man and took care of me. I hope you are well. I remain, your loving niece, DOROTHEA HELEN POMEROY.'"

That was all. It was a very short letter, but it took her a long time to write. There were many things she could have said, lots of questions she wanted to ask, and to have answers to. She wanted to know if Aunt Julia missed her; if she felt lonely; if she had had tea in the garden; if the robin had been down to look for her—but she did not dare. In the first place Miss Garland would have scorned such questions, and in the second place Dorothea knew that she would not answer them.

So, though feeling dissatisfied and unhappy, she ended up her letter with the same, and when the few lines reached Laburnum Cottage Miss Garland looked at them with angry, scornful eyes, and tossed them from her. "So that's all she can find to say after living six years with me! She has forgotten already, that's plain to see!"

Yet in her inmost heart she did not believe so badly of Dorothea as that, though she pretended she did.

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Mrs Pomeroy came into the room just as Dorothea was putting the last strokes to the direction on the envelope. "Finished, dear? That is right. Now I want you to make yourself tidy and nice, for I have had a telegram from your Uncle Hugh to say he will be here for dinner, and I want him to see his new niece."

"Uncle Hugh?" questioned Dorothea in a puzzled voice. She had not yet learned what new relations she had, nor where they lived.

"Yes, dear. My eldest son, your father's brother."

"I didn't know Daddy had a brother," said Dorothea simply. "Is Aunt Isabel Daddy's sister?"

"Why, yes, dear! Isabel is my only daughter."

Dorothea felt relieved; she did not want any more aunts. "Does Uncle Hugh live here, Granny?"

"This is his house, but he is not often here." There was a note of sadness in Mrs Pomeroy's voice. "He is fond of travel. He is coming now for only a few days to see your aunt before she goes back to India."

"Is Uncle Hugh like Daddy, Granny?" Dorothea asked eagerly, but, to her disappointment, her grandmother shook her head.

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"No, dear, your uncle and Aunt Isabel are alike, but neither is like John, neither in features nor colouring, nor—nor disposition nor tastes. They are neither of them happy unless they are travelling; your father was never so happy as when at home. He loved this place, every stone of it—he was a regular mother's boy in his love for his home." The tired voice quavered and broke, and tears welled up in the sad old eyes. "He always loved to come back to his home and me."

Dorothea's eyes filled too. "I think I must be like Daddy," she said wistfully. "I loved every bit of the house, and, oh, the garden, I loved it so——"

"What house?" asked Mrs Pomeroy sharply.

"Aunt Julia's," Dorothea stammered, suddenly becoming aware that her confidences had given anything but pleasure. The look of disapproval on her grandmother's kind face, added to the overwrought state of her nerves, was more than she could bear. "Oh, Granny," she cried, bursting into tears, "I had to love something, and—and Aunt Julia would not let me love her, and none of the Baxters and the Garlands liked me, and we hadn't a dog or a cat, and I—I couldn't help loving something."

At that pitiful outburst all the disapproval and disappointment died out of Mrs Pomeroy's

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face, leaving nothing behind but love, and tenderness, and pity.

"Oh, my poor little neglected one!" she cried remorsefully; "you shall never, never again want for someone to love you—as long as I am alive." And into her outstretched arms Dorothea ran, and nestled as close as a bird to its mother.

"In time you will learn to love this house too, will you not, darling? You will love it for your father's sake—and mine!"

"I can love both!" cried Dorothea cheerfully. "I do love this already, but I can't unlove the other, can I, Granny?"

For just a moment Granny hesitated; then, "No, my darling," she said steadily, "I would not wish you to. I would not have you do so if you could. But I want all the love my little grandchild can spare me. Old people sometimes need love and petting as much as young ones do, Dorothea."

## CHAPTER IX

### DOROTHEA'S NEW FRIENDS

God made the glow-worm as well as the stars ; the light in both is divine. If I be an earth-star to gladden the wayside, I must cultivate humbly and rejoicingly its green earth-glow, and not seek to blanch it to the whiteness of the stars that lie in the fields of blue.—GEORGE MACDONALD

UNCLE HUGH had arrived, and Dorothea had been sent for to come and speak to him.

"This is John's little daughter, Hugh," said Mrs Pomeroy eagerly, taking Dorothea's hand in hers and drawing her forward.

For a moment uncle and niece gazed at each other in silence ; Dorothea with shy, timid friendliness, Hugh Pomeroy calmly criticizing. He did not shake hands with her, or kiss her, or show any pleasure at sight of her. He only stared, and whether he was pleased or not Dorothea could not divine.

"So this is poor old Jack's child?" he remarked at last. "She is like him—in features, at any rate."

"She has his blue eyes," interposed Mrs

## Dorothea's New Friends

Halford, "but not his colouring. Jack had not dark eyebrows or eyelashes—and they do alter a face so——"

"Well, the child has the advantage there," broke in Mr Pomeroy with a hearty laugh. Dorothea wondered what there was to laugh at. Mrs Halford coloured and tossed her head.

"I can never see that dark eyelashes and eyebrows are beautiful," she said crossly. "To me they—they always look so—so—artificial."

Hugh Pomeroy laughed again, more boisterously than ever. "Well, Dorothea's look genuine enough." Then, stretching out a hand to his niece, he said good-humouredly, "Well, young woman, aren't you going to speak to your uncle! You seem to be a very solemn little person. Can you smile? You aren't like your father if you can't!"

Dorothea's nervousness vanished rapidly, her face lighted up, and her blue eyes sparkled. "I thought I ought to wait until you did, Uncle Hugh," she said mischievously, and Hugh Pomeroy burst into a roar of laughter.

"That's one to you," he said good-temperedly. "Now give me a kiss, like a dutiful niece."

And Dorothea, as she did her duty, and received a warm kiss in return, felt that she was



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going to like her new uncle, and that they were going to be friends.

Letting his niece go, Hugh Pomeroy turned to his mother with a face half tragic, half laughing. "Mater," he said solemnly, "I have not had a crumb inside my lips since breakfast, and I am famished—fainting."

"My poor boy, oh, my poor boy, why didn't you say so before?" Mrs Pomeroy was plunged into distress. "Ring the bell at once, Isabel, please, and tell them to hurry forward dinner as quickly as possible. Of course you must be exhausted, Hugh, dear."

Dorothea was amused. "He does not look fainting," she thought; and then, as no one seemed to need her presence any longer, she slipped away to her own room and her books.

The coming of the master had altered everything. In a moment the sleepy house had wakened to life. Servants were hurrying in all directions. In Uncle Hugh's rooms one was busy unstrapping boxes, while his valet was putting away clothes and things in wardrobe and drawers.

"And he has come for only a few days!" said Dorothea. "I thought it was only ladies who had such lots of luggage. I wonder how much Aunt Isabel takes when she travels!"

She found the answer to that question as the days went by, for the corridor outside Mrs

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Halford's room flowed over with boxes strapped and unstrapped. Some were corded and sealed ready to go; and all day long Mrs Halford's maid, and Mary the housemaid, and a dress-maker, were busy; and all three grew so white and tired and irritable, Dorothea scarcely dared speak to them.

During that last week she saw very little of either her uncle or her aunt. Day after day they went off together in motor or carriage to pay farewell visits, or to the town to buy more things, or just for a spin. It seemed as though they were not able to rest indoors; and as her Granny kept very much to her own room, there was nothing for Dorothea to do but to keep to hers, or walk in the park.

"When all this bustle is over," Granny said one day, "Gray is going to give you riding lessons, dear. Your uncle wishes it, and I think it will be a great advantage to you. Edwards is getting a habit for you." Edwards was Mrs Pomeroy's own maid.

Dorothea's heart beat fast with nervousness and excitement. She had never been on a horse in her life. She had never been near one, in fact, until she came to Yabsley Park; and though she could never have made up her mind to admit it, she was half afraid of them. "Perhaps when the first lessons are over I shall not mind," she thought to herself, trying

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hard to be brave, for she really did long to be able to ride about the country.

"Have her taught to skate, too," said Uncle Hugh at luncheon the next day, "and to row, and swim, and dance, and golf." Dorothea gasped. She would like to be able to swim, but——. "Girls should know how to do all these things," went on Uncle Hugh. "When I come home again I will stay longer, and I'll teach her to fence and shoot, and I'll take her out hunting. You would like that, wouldn't you, Dolly?"

Dorothea's heart sank. She could never learn to do all those dreadful things. She did not want to. She could never, never bring herself to shoot, she felt quite sure. What fencing was she did not know, but she felt sure it was something in the way of fighting.

"She must have music and singing lessons, of course," chimed in Mrs Halford; "and she should have a good knowledge of at least three languages. Mother, darling, do be very particular about her accent; accent is everything. She should have the best teachers or none at all. When she is a year or two older she can go to France or Italy to finish."

Poor Mrs Pomeroy looked bewildered. "I—I don't quite know how to manage so many things," she said helplessly. "Perhaps, after all, it will be wiser to send her to a good

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school. I had thought of getting a governess for her——”

Mrs Halford agreed promptly. “It would be far better to send her to school, Mother. It would save you any further trouble.”

“Trouble!” People always used that word when they spoke of her. “Wherever I go I seem to be a trouble,” sighed Dorothea wistfully.

“It would be only pleasure,” pleaded Mrs Pomeroy pathetically. “Nothing I can do for John’s child could be a trouble. I did not want to give her up. When you and Hugh are gone I shall be very lonely, and I was looking forward to Dorothea’s companionship—but if it is for the child’s good——”

Mrs Halford sprang up and kissed her mother. She was more tender to her in these last days. Their parting was to be for years, and even she could not help seeing how delicate and fragile her mother had become. “Of course you will be lonely, darling! Then do just as you like about Dorothea; after all, it does not matter much. She will not have to take the position I had to, of course, and—oh, there is the car, and I haven’t even a hat on!” and away she hurried.

Hugh Pomeroy got up and strolled to the window, where he stood for a moment looking out thoughtfully. Perhaps he felt a little

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ashamed of his selfishness in leaving his mother almost always alone, while he was away bent simply on pleasure. Once he turned and gazed at her searchingly. Yes, she certainly had aged. The last few years had left their mark.

"Don't send Dorothea away, Mother," he said abruptly. "Keep her at home for company; have a governess for her, or masters, or—or let her run wild for a bit. Do exactly as you please, but don't send her to school—at any rate until I come home and settle. I should feel happier if I knew she was with you."

Mrs Pomeroy's eyes filled with tears at such unusual care for herself.

"I shall be home again in the spring, you know, Mother."

"In April or May, and now it is only the end of June! Nearly a whole year!" thought his mother sadly; "and I have so few years left!" But all she said aloud was, "Yes, I would like to keep her, Hugh. I feel I can't spare her too."

"No, no, of course not!" Hugh responded lamely; then he hurried away to put on his hat and coat.

The next day Mrs Halford and Hugh Pomeroy left, and the Manor settled down to a time of almost melancholy quiet. In saying good-bye

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to her daughter for at least three years Mrs Pomeroy felt that she was saying good-bye for ever. And for close upon a year she would be sonless too.

It was not to be wondered at that she felt lonely, and that in her loneliness she turned to her little granddaughter with an almost passionate love and craving for her company. And Dorothea, happy to be loved and wanted at last, proud and glad with the knowledge that she was of some use, and no longer a trouble, poured out on the lonely old heart all the pent-up love that had been accumulating in her own heart for years, waiting for someone on whom to lavish it.

Grandmother and grandchild grew very near to one another in those days, so quiet, so happy and peaceful. They read and worked together, drove and walked together. Dorothea sat contentedly hour after hour at her needlework while Granny told her tales of her children, of their babyhood and schooldays, their pranks and their play, but most often her tales were of John, the best loved of them all, and of these tales Dorothea never tired.

All the love and petting that she used to divide between Isabel, Hugh, and John, Mrs Pomeroy now lavished on her child's child. "I shall certainly be spoiled," thought Dorothea with grave concern. "I am sure I ought not



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to have so much. What would Aunt Julia say? "

She was gazing at some new autumn frocks laid out on her bed. One was of soft white cloth, one of blue, and another of red. There were hats too, and a feather boa. "I really don't know when I can wear them all!" The thought quite troubled her. She had lived with Miss Garland too long to become extravagant all at once with an easy conscience. Indeed, it distressed her to have so much more of everything than she needed, but she could not explain her feeling to her Granny.

So the days and weeks slipped by; July came and went, and August was almost past. Day after day Dorothea had watched for the postman, hoping that a letter might come from Aunt Julia, but now at last she gave up hope. Aunt Julia evidently meant to keep her word. From the moment the train carried Dorothea away to the new life that she had chosen, the old life was to be dead to her. But the old life was not dead to her. The early days, the home we first remember, never die for us. Absence but makes us, as it made Dorothea, forget the unpleasantnesses, and remember only what we loved.

Sometimes Dorothea's longing to see again the little brown house, the neat garden, the robins, the rose-bush, and her own little room,

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were almost more than she could bear, especially in silence. She never spoke of it to her Granny, but in her sleep she often went back to Laburnum Cottage, and lived her old life in her dreams, and her longing grew greater.

"Aunt Julia must be lonely. She must miss me a little," she said to herself over and over again; and sometimes she cried herself to sleep. Then toward the end of August Mrs Pomeroy fell into a great state of alarm. Dorothea was not well. She had grown pale and listless, her spirits flagged, and she was easily tired. The doctor was sent for, and Dorothea was sounded and examined, and questioned and cross-questioned.

"What she wants is variety, young companionship, and a more outdoor life," said Dr Soames, when he had listened to the story of how Dorothea's days were spent. "Send her to school, Mrs Pomeroy; send her to school."

"But I can't spare her, Doctor," cried Granny, almost in tears. "She is my sole companion; I don't know what I should do without her!"

Dr Soames, who had known Granny ever since she first came to Yabsley as a bride, gave her a glance which, short though it was, took in a good deal more than anyone would have imagined. He knew the story of her children,

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her sorrows, her disappointments, and loneliness.

"I know, I know," he said kindly; "I did not mean a boarding-school, but a good day-school. Don't bother her with too many lessons; it is not at school that she will learn most. But let her go to and fro every day; the journey will do her good. She will get to know children of her own age, and learn some wickedness from them too. She is too grave and sober. Old heads on young shoulders always bow the shoulders, and narrow the chest, and make faces lose the habit of laughing. Don't send her shut up in a carriage; let her cycle or ride or go by train—or walk, if she has time; that would be best of all." Then, in answer to Mrs Pomeroy's horrified face, "It is only three miles—nothing for young feet to cover!"

Dorothea's face brightened. "I'd love to walk," she cried, "or go by train. I love going by train. I could walk to the station in the morning and home from it in the afternoon, couldn't I, Dr Soames?"

"Of course you could, and an excellent plan too. There are several nice little people who go to and from Miss Ferguson's, at Daynton, every day—and you could not find a better school in England, Mrs Pomeroy. If you send Miss Dorothea there, they could travel to and

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fro together. Well, I will leave you to think about it. Now," getting up to take his departure, "don't you worry about Miss Dorothea," he added kindly, as he shook his old friend by the hand. "Leave her to me, and put all anxiety about her out of your mind." And the doctor strode off, leaving both his patients feeling better already.

After that, changes came quickly. If the doctor ordered something for Dorothea, that something, according to Mrs Pomeroy, must be done, especially if Dorothea wanted to do it. Miss Ferguson was written to that night, and before the week was out Dorothea and her Granny had journeyed to Daynton, made Miss Ferguson's acquaintance, gone over the school, and completed all arrangements for Dorothea to go there as a day-girl when the new term began.

During the interview Miss Ferguson looked frankly pleased and cheerful, poor Mrs Pomeroy sad and rather anxious, Dorothea pleased yet nervous.

"I—am afraid I am very stupid," she said gravely, gazing at her future mistress with solemn, apologetic eyes. "I—I—have never been to a real school before."

Miss Ferguson laughed good-humouredly; she did not seem at all alarmed. "I am quite sure you will not be backward very

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long," she said encouragingly; "I can see you are not stupid."

"How funny!" thought Dorothea; "Aunt Julia and Aunt Baxter said that they could see that I was!"

"You will not press her too hard?" Mrs Pomeroy broke in anxiously; "you will not give her too much to do, will you? The doctor said it—it did not matter so much about the lessons; it is companionship and change that she needs."

Miss Ferguson laid a kindly hand on the anxious little lady's arm.

"Dear Mrs Pomeroy," she said earnestly, "I assure you I never allow any of my girls to be overworked. I have been teaching for many years, and I know one only gets bad results and disappointment from over-pressing pupils. What is the use of a prodigy of knowledge if her health is ruined? We want just healthy, happy girls and women, don't we? Comparatively few of my girls are compelled to earn their living, but everyone of them has her place in life to fill, her own little corner entrusted to her to keep, her own light to keep brightly burning somewhere. My hope is that there may be no dark, neglected corners where my girls are placed by God in His great scheme, but a brightly glowing light, which will be a help and a guide to others."

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All the sadness had died out of Mrs Pomeroy's face when she held out her hand in farewell. "I am so glad I was led to bring my little girl to you," she said gratefully; "I shall feel quite happy about her now."

When Dorothea's turn came to say good-bye she did not hold out her hand to her future school-mistress; instead she held up her grave little face to kiss her. "Oh, I do want to be a glow-worm!" she said earnestly. "Will you please teach me how?"

Just a shadow of a smile played around Miss Ferguson's lips, but a mist came before her eyes. "I think you are one already, dear," she answered gently; "but storms may come, and fogs, and grey days, and perhaps I may be able to help you to keep your little light burning steadily through them. I will do my best."

"Thank you!" said Dorothea; "I should love to try to keep a corner bright—but I never seem to have one."

"Your corner is wherever you happen to be, dear. That is the spot God means you to keep bright for Him."

"Oh!" said Dorothea, surprised; and all the way home she was very thoughtful. Life seemed suddenly to have grown very serious and real, but very grand and interesting. "I never thought that one little girl like me could



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make any difference—except to be a trouble,” she said to herself. “And I didn’t think that my corner was just where I am. It seems so strange, but it’s ‘normously interesting!’”

“Granny,” she said presently, “have you ever seen a glow-worm?”

Granny roused herself suddenly from a doze. “Glow-worms? Oh, yes, numbers of them. They were quite common where I lived when I was little. They are very wonderful little creatures, very beautiful, in fact.”

Dorothea’s face grew graver. “It is strange that common things are so very often beautiful. There are the cabbage butterflies and the little white roses, and now the glow-worms. Granny, why are some things called common, when they are ever so much more beautiful than other things that are not called common? And why are they called common if they are beautiful? Aren’t they——”

“Oh,” cried Granny, in laughing desperation, “stop, stop, my dear child! Don’t ask me any more questions, for pity’s sake! I am bewildered already. Now, where can I begin? In the first place you must learn that the word ‘common’ has several meanings. One meaning is ‘general,’ or—now, let me see, how can I explain it so that you can understand? Sometimes it means that there are a great number of the same kind, such as cabbage butterflies.

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Sometimes it means vulgar, and rude. One is a thing that you cannot help, the other you can. You could not help being a cabbage butterfly any more than you could help being an eagle, or a great auk; but you can help being rude and unkind and vulgar in your manners and conduct, and your thoughts and speech. Do you think you understand a little, Dorothea? "

Dorothea nodded her head slowly. "Yes, Granny, but it takes a lot of thinking about." She was wondering which kind of 'common' Aunt Isabel had meant when she spoke of Miss Garland. "I think I understand some of it; but I think there should be different words for the different kinds; and I don't see why my roses are called common, for they are very hard to get, ever so much harder than any others. My guard told me he could not get one anywhere, and Mary said she never saw one now. And then there are the glow-worms. You said they were common, Granny, but I have never seen more than one in all my life."

Mrs Pomeroy laughed. "I think I too shall have to have a year at Miss Ferguson's, to learn how to answer questions. But, my dear," said Granny more gravely, "I do not wonder that you are puzzled. We are all getting into such a careless way of talking, and that in itself is common. I should have said that glow-worms

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were very general in some parts of the country, but very rare in others."

"Oh," cried Dorothea, in tones of relief; "then a common, general thing can be rare too, like my roses; and then when they are rare everybody loves them."

"Everybody loves what is sweet and beautiful," said Granny, "whether it is rare or not. So, too, everyone loves sweet and beautiful people, no matter in what position of life they may be born. God made certain things and certain people what they are, and places them where He thinks fit, and gives them a certain bit of His own garden—the world—to keep bright and fragrant and in good order; and it is not for us to question and doubt, mope and complain, because we are not something else. Our eyes might as well complain that they cannot hear, or our ears that they cannot speak! If your white roses drooped and refused to grow because they were not orchids and kept in a hot-house, what would happen?"

"I should never have known them," sighed Dorothea. "Oh, I am so glad they aren't!"

"Yes, and many another has reason to be thankful too. Many a lovely corner and house, now full of sweetness, would be bare and ugly, and presently the foolish rose would be dug up and thrown away as of no use to anyone. Roses and glow-worms and butterflies are a

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brave example to us, darling, of faith and courage and obedience. They do what God tells them to do, and without envy or doubt or complaining, and the world is very, very much better for the dear, common things, which are such a blessing to all in it."

## CHAPTER X

### THE PATH OF DUTY

God make my life a little staff,  
Whereon the weak may rest,  
That so what health and strength I have  
May serve my neighbours best.

M. B. BETHAM-EDWARDS

**T**HE very next day active preparations began for getting Dorothea ready for her school life.

She herself thought that she had every kind of thing that any little girl could want ; every kind of boot and shoe, hat and suit, mackintosh, wrap, and overshoe. But Mrs Pomeroy thought otherwise. Dorothea must have a dark-blue coat and skirt for school wear, a wet-weather hat, a fine-weather hat, and one to wear should it snow or freeze. There must be a gymnasium dress and a dancing dress, and shoes for each, not to speak of books and satchels, racquet, hockey-stick, and any number of other things, until Dorothea grew weary of new possessions. She was really embarrassed by them. It seemed as though so very, very much was expected of her. She had always been accustomed to having so little,

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that all this supply of things seemed to her a dreadful waste, and dreadfully like what Aunt Julia used to call 'showing off'!

"I have enough for two or three, and I am sure there are lots of little girls who would be glad to have some."

She had this feeling even more strongly when term began, and she found herself the most elaborately dressed and fitted-out young person in the school—and none the more popular because of it. Indeed, she might have suffered a good deal, but she was so kind and good-tempered, so free from conceit, and so generous with all she had, that none of the girls could help liking her.

There came a day, though, when she did rebel. Winter set in early that year, and Dorothea made her way to school and home again over frost-bound roads, or with a blustering wind tearing across the fields, beating and buffeting her until her cheeks glowed and she was breathless. She loved it; she loved racing before the wind, or battling against it. Her spirits grew higher and higher, and her appetite larger; she slept like a top from night till morning, and woke up feeling glad that another day had come. But Mrs Pomeroy was troubled. The weather was too rough and cold for her precious little granddaughter to walk in. It was not fit for her. She must have warm furs,



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and she must be driven to and from school. So one morning when Dorothea was getting ready, Granny came into her room carrying a dainty ermine muff in one hand and a stole in the other.

"Oh, how lovely!" cried Dorothea.

Granny beamed with pleasure. "I thought you would like them, darling, and I am so glad they have come in time for you to wear them this bitterly cold day. There now," fastening the stole about Dorothea's neck and shoulders, and putting the muff into her hands, "how pretty the white fur looks on your dark blue coat, and how snug and warm it will keep you!"

"Oh, yes, I can feel the warmth already—and, oh," cried Dorothea, surveying herself in the glass, "I think they are the prettiest things I ever saw!" But presently the delight began to die out of her face, and she laid the muff on the bed and began to unfasten the stole.

"Why are you taking it off?" cried Granny. "You are ready, aren't you? Don't take it off, darling; it is for you to wear to-day."

But Dorothea seemed embarrassed and troubled. She stood in the middle of the room with the stole in her hand, but she did not attempt to put it on again. She knew that she was going to pain her Granny, and yet—

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and yet she could not help it. It was so hard to find words in which to explain.

She looked at her grandmother with pleading, troubled eyes. "Please, Granny, I—I would rather not. I—I love the fur, and—I am longing to wear it, but not at school. None of the other girls do, and—and it would seem like—like brag"—she blurted out the last words in her anxiety to make all clear—"like showing off. It would make the poorer girls feel—uncomfortable." Dorothea knew by experience what the feeling was, although she did not say so. "And I should feel miserable. It is—oh, it's horrid to be made to feel you are dreadfully badly dressed!" She stopped abruptly, her face very red.

For a moment Mrs Pomeroy looked almost more annoyed than disappointed, but she recovered herself quickly.

"I understand," she said gravely as she laid the beautiful things on Dorothea's bed. "I—ought to have known, but I thought only of you, dear; I am apt to forget that I may only embarrass you in my desire to give you all you need."

Dorothea scarcely understood her, but she felt that Granny was hurt, and the knowledge distressed her. "Oh, Granny, don't be sorry, and don't be vexed with me," she pleaded, with tears in her eyes; "I love my beautiful

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fur," holding it to her soft cheek caressingly, "I love it; and, oh"—running to her grandmother and throwing her arms about her neck—"I love you, Granny dear, most of all!"

So the delicate fur was put aside, and Dorothea wore her woollen scarf, such as the other girls wore, and was happy. But on one point she had to submit. On wet days she was driven to school in the closed carriage.

She did not enjoy it, but, after all, it was only a tiny, tiny hardship, and on fine days she was free to go as she chose, and her favourite way of all was to ride to the station on her pony, and then journey into Daynton by train. She loved the ride, and loved the little journey with her schoolfellows for company, and above all she was thrilled with the hope that she might meet her guard once more. She did not realize that he travelled on the express which passed through the station after she had reached school in the morning, or before she got out in the afternoon. If she had but understood she would have been saved much disappointment and hopeless watching for him.

At Christmas, though, when the trains all seemed to start at any hour but the right one, Dorothea's train and Guard Jeffreys' train stood in Daynton Station at the same time, and the very first person on whom Dorothea's eyes fell was her very own guard himself. With a cry



SHE ALMOST FLUNG HERSELF INTO GUARD JEFFREYS' ARMS



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of joy, and forgetting everyone and everything else, she flew along the crowded platform, over bags and boxes, round trucks and people, dogs and hampers and porters, and almost flung herself into Guard Jeffreys' arms.

"Oh, I am so glad!" she cried breathlessly. "I thought I was never going to see you again."

Guard Jeffreys, rather embarrassed at finding himself with an armful of little girl, pulled himself together and tried to look as pleased as he could.

"And I am pleased to see you, miss," he answered politely; but it was very easy to see that he had no idea who she was. And, after all, it was not to be wondered at that he did not recognize in the happy-faced, laughing girl, in the pretty red dress and black fur cap perched jauntily on her bright hair, the little badly dressed maiden whom he had seen but once, and then with red eyes and disfigured face.

"Don't you know me?" Dorothea looked half-amused, half-disappointed. "Don't you remember I travelled with you last June from Blybury to Yabsley, and—and I gave you a bit of my white rose, and you said you loved them, but hadn't ever been able to get a bush——"

"Why, of course I remember that little lady! Of course I do! I ain't likely to forget her—



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and do you mean to say that you are the same? Well, missie, all I can say is, you're a credit to them that has the care of you. Excuse me saying so. I can hardly believe my eyes, and I can't be blamed for not knowing you again. For one thing you must have grown inches since I saw you last, and you've got the right sort of colour in your cheeks—and—and you are dressed so different. That day I saw you, your hat came down and mostly hid your face!"

"Did it?" laughed Dorothea ruefully; "I know I wished it did."

"Then you are happier than you were that day, missie, by the looks of you?"

Dorothea nodded vigorously. "Oh, yes, I am very, very happy. Everybody is nice, and Granny is so kind! She gives me everything I want. Sometimes"—with a sigh—"I almost wish I had something to wish for!"

The guard laughed. "Well, missie, you can always wish for that, can't you? But I wouldn't wish too hard," he added more gravely, "for you may get more to wish for than you want. Have you got your rose-bush yet?"

"No. Why, of course, that is something left to wish for, isn't it? If I had had one I should have sent it, or part of it, to you. Don't you remember"—reproachfully—"I promised to?"

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"So you did, missie. I haven't forgot, but things might have come along to make you forget."

"I shall never forget," said Dorothea gravely. "You were so kind to me, I want to do something for you."

A shout made the guard look round. "I am wanted, missie," he said regretfully; "I am afraid I must go—but I hope we shall meet again some day soon."

"Oh, but"—eagerly—"there is one thing more I want specially to ask you before you go. It is about Aunt Julia. Do you ever see her, or hear anything about her? You remember her? She asked you to take care of me that day——"

John Jeffreys smiled. Dorothea so little dreamed of the numbers of people who, almost every day of his life, put someone in his charge.

"I haven't heard, missie, one way or the other, but I'll make a point of inquiring now I know you want to hear about her. Shall I say you told me to?"

Dorothea almost screamed, "Oh, no! she mustn't know anything about it, please!" She remembered only too well her Aunt Julia's dislike of any talk about herself or her affairs; and for Dorothea to be making inquiries about her would show Blybury people the terms they were on. Aunt Julia would bitterly resent

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that. "Oh, no, please," repeated Dorothea anxiously; "I do want to know how she is, but I don't want anyone to know that I don't know—if you can understand what I mean!" she added, thinking it might seem rude if she gave no explanation.

"I understand. I will just keep my eyes and ears open and"—with a knowing smile—"my mouth shut. Good day, missie, I must be off now. I hope it won't be so long before we meet again."

"Oh, no," said Dorothea earnestly; "it mustn't. Good-bye!" And she decided hopefully that she would try and see him again before the holidays were over. She longed to hear about Aunt Julia and Blybury.

But fate was stronger than Dorothea. A whole month passed before she was able to go to the station again. The holidays began the next day, so there was not even school to take her in that direction. She could not walk all the way there and back alone, unknown to anyone, nor would she have done so if she could, and she did not like to ask permission to go, for she would have had to explain her reasons to her Granny, and she knew Granny would be displeased, for she thought Dorothea had forgotten Blybury and all the people there, and she discouraged any mention of Miss Garland.

Christmas, too, was a very busy time, for

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there was a Christmas-tree for the poor children and a tea and supper for the grown-ups, and everyone was called upon to help. Dorothea was invited to parties by her school-fellows, and Mrs Pomeroy gave a large party in return ; so altogether the short dark days were very full. And presently the frost grew harder and harder ; the pond in the park froze, and Dorothea learned to skate. And so the days slipped by, and before she had realized it five whole weeks had passed, and school had begun again.

In term-time her chances of meeting the guard were really fewer, and many weeks had passed before she saw his friendly face again, and then it was only for a few minutes.

" Yes, missie," he said in answer to her eager questions, " I heard once or twice about your auntie, but nothing particular. Nobody seems to know much about her. She keeps herself to herself mostly, I believe, but they say her health isn't so good as it was and she has broken up a bit this last year. I wish I could have got more news, and better, to bring, but I couldn't without making people wonder why I was asking so many questions."

" Thank you," said Dorothea gratefully ; " thank you very much. I am so much obliged to you. I think I will——" But what she thought she would Guard Jeffreys never knew,

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for the train was on the move, and he had to spring on to it.

That evening, though, Dorothea wrote to her aunt, a long letter this time, and more affectionate, for much of her old fear had been forgotten. She told her as much of her doings as she thought would interest and please her. She described her school and her school-fellows, her garden and the plants in it. She did not attempt to hide her affection either, for her heart was very full of what the guard had told her. "Her health is not as good as it was, and she has broken up a good bit this last year."

Poor Aunt Julia, she had always been so strong, and grew so annoyed if any little thing ailed her!

Dorothea felt genuine satisfaction over this letter, and posted it in a state of glad excitement. Surely it could not fail to please Aunt Julia, she thought, and she pictured her receiving it.

But if it pleased her, or if it even reached her, Dorothea never knew—at least, not until years later—for no answer ever came. For weeks she lived in expectation, and was thrown into a flutter of excitement every time the post-bag was brought in; but in time she began to realize that Aunt Julia did not intend to write to her, and the old feeling returned—the feeling

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that her love had been flung back at her unwanted.

And as it happened that months went by without her getting another glimpse of her guard or any opportunity of gleaning more tidings, other things by degrees filled her thoughts, and she ceased to worry about Aunt Julia. Her life at that time was very full, and very happy. She was really trying hard to make her own little corner bright and cheerful. She had her school, and her riding lessons, needlework and music, her garden, and picnics and parties too, for Mrs Pomeroy insisted now on play as well as work. But no matter how much else Dorothea had to do, she devoted every possible minute to her Granny. She had come to feel that where Granny was there was her corner. And in this fashion the time flew by, until she reached her fourteenth birthday.

She was one of the head girls of the school by that time, but she was not one of the 'show' girls. Mrs Pomeroy would not allow her to work very hard, and shuddered at the mere mention of examinations. The lessons that she did learn, though, were such as helped to shape her life.

"And now, little children, abide in Him, that, when He shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming." That was the root of Miss



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Ferguson's teaching, the root she planted in the hearts of her girls, and who can say how far the roots spread, or how many lives were brightened and made fragrant by the blossoms that sprang from that root, or how far the seeds were scattered?

"Let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth." That was the great lesson her girls learned, and carried away with them wherever duty called them.

"It is like a royal command," said Miss Ferguson, "direct from the King. If we remembered that always, we should pause before we did and said many of the things that we say and do—things unworthy of us, I mean."

At the Manor life went on more and more quietly, more monotonously. Mrs Pomeroy and Dorothea drove together, and talked and worked together, but in these later days especially they saw very little other company, for Granny grew more feeble, and less and less able to do things. Yet Dorothea never felt dull. "I want to be useful to someone," had always been her longing, and here she saw her opportunity; and Granny, unlike Aunt Julia, let her love her and show her love. Indeed, she asked for it. She clung to the once neglected, unloved child, and relied on her for everything.

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"What did I do without you, darling? What should I do without you if you were to leave me now?"

"But, Granny, I never, never will!" cried Dorothea earnestly. Granny looked at her with wistful, loving eyes. "No, dear, I know. It is I who will leave you, I expect. I feel sometimes that we may not have very long together, after all."

Then, seeing Dorothea's distress, she tried to soothe her fear away. But, though they did not speak of it again, the fear was there, and lay like a shadow over Dorothea's life from that day, giving her a new understanding of the seriousness and inevitableness of life—giving her greater love and patience too, and an even deeper desire to help.

For those about to leave us for ever, we feel we cannot do enough, and that was how Dorothea felt.

"I am not a little girl any longer," she said on the morning of her fourteenth birthday. "I can't feel like one. I am one of the King's grown-up daughters now."

"Not grown-up, my darling! You must keep your youth as long as ever you can, for your own sake, and for the sake of others. Some keep youth in their hearts to the end of their lives, and they are the sunbeams of the world. It is a wonderful gift from God that,

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one you must never willingly lay aside. If you feel old already, I shall have to send you away to be with younger folk. It shows that it is bad for you to be always cooped up with an old body like me."

But that thought Dorothea could not bear. "Oh, no, no!" she pleaded. "Granny, I will never let my heart grow old." But at that moment the butler brought in a parcel for her, and in the excitement of opening it they forgot their sadness.

Dorothea had had many gifts that day. Many, that is, for her, who, until she came to Yabsley, had never even known the real date of her birth. Her grandmother had given her a string of seed pearls—a birthday gift from her own father to herself fifty years before. Edwards had made her a pretty green pincushion. Several of her school friends had remembered the day with gifts of books and trinkets and boxes of chocolates, until she had thought it impossible that anything more could come for her. And now there was this—a long, shapeless parcel of straw and bass, with a few green leaves straggling out at one end. Fastened to it was a label with her name and address, written in a clear clerk-like hand on one side of it, and on the other, "John Jeffreys' best respects."

For a moment Dorothea stared at it, speech-

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less with surprise and joy, then: "Oh, Granny," she cried, "it is a rose-bush—one of my own dear little cottage roses! My guard has sent it to me after all! You remember him, Granny—the nice guard I told you about, who was so good to me the day I came here. Isn't it kind of him to remember after all this long time? And won't it be lovely to have it? I'll plant it in my own garden. Oh, I do hope it will take root and live! I must write and thank him—I wonder where he is!"

But though she turned the wrappings over and over, and searched them inside and out, she could find no clue. "I suppose he must still be at Porth Freath. I shall write to him there."

Before, though, she did anything else, she went out in search of the old gardener. The rose must be planted with the greatest possible care, and the very nicest spot must be found for it.

"Oh, Gardener," she sighed anxiously, as they rested after choosing the spot and preparing the soil and placing every little bit of root out comfortable and straight—"Oh, Gardener, I do hope it will like it and be happy there! Do you really think it will grow?" Her eyes sought his questioningly.

"Ay, miss, I do. I haven't seen one of them old-fashioned roses not since I was a boy, and

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I mostly forgets what they do like—but I b'lieve they're good-tempered, and takes kindly to any place where they can get a bit of sun."

"The dears! Don't you love those little roses, Gardener?"

The old man nodded his head gravely. "I'm bound to say I'm powerful fond of 'em, miss. They mayn't be one of them there choice kinds, but I never knew such a rose for—for clinging round your—your fancy." The old man was shy of saying 'heart,' but that was what he meant. "I never get a whiff of their scent but what it brings back to my mind my old 'ome and my poor mother, and—and all the rest of it, as clear as if 'twas only yesterday I see'd 'em."

"I know," cried Dorothea, and before her own eyes came a picture of a little brown house, and a window into which white roses peeped and nodded friendlily.

In after times, when she looked back over these days, Dorothea dated all the changes that followed from the day the little rose-bush came and was planted. That night Uncle Hugh returned unexpectedly, and what happened after his arrival, or how things came about, Dorothea could never afterward recall. But things did happen, and rapidly too.

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Apparently Hugh Pomeroy, who saw his mother so seldom, noticed in her a greater change than those who were always with her could realize. Anyhow, within a few days of his coming, Dr Soames called one afternoon. "I was passing," he explained as he noted the anxious look on his old friend's face, "and I thought I would come in and ask you to give me a cup of tea. Well, there is no need to ask how this young person is," clasping Dorothea's little white hand in his great brown one. "I am quite proud of her. I never had a patient who responded so well to my treatment."

"I don't suppose you order such nice treatment for many of your patients," said Dorothea, laughing up at him as she handed him a cup of tea.

She suspected nothing of the truth, neither did Mrs Pomeroy. They thought only that the doctor had called in for an ordinary friendly call. But later on Dorothea remembered that from that time he took to 'dropping in' every week, and that by and by, when autumn came on, he began to talk of the pleasures and advantages of wintering abroad, until finally—and without their quite knowing how or why—it was decided that it would make a pleasant change for Mrs Pomeroy and Dorothea to pass the winter in a warmer and more lively spot.



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"It will be an excellent thing for Miss Dorothea," said Dr Soames, dwelling especially on this view of the matter. "She will be able to talk French all day long, and there is no education like that of travel."

That, and Dorothea's pleased face, determined Mrs Pomeroy. Notice was sent at once to Miss Ferguson that Dorothea would not be returning; rooms were taken, outfits bought, and Dorothea and Mrs Pomeroy and Edwards—Granny's maid—before they had fully realized what was happening, found themselves packed and on their way to Cannes for six months at least. And so, though she little dreamed it then, Dorothea's school life ended, and she had started out on a new stage of life's journey.

She enjoyed that winter in a foreign land, amid new scenes and people, and a gaiety she had never known before. She was happy, too; she always was happy with her Granny. Yet over her some vague uneasiness hung like a shadow all the time, for even she, always with her as she was, could not help seeing that a great change had come over her Granny.

At first, in the beautiful air, and amid beautiful scenery, Granny had grown almost brisk again, and talked and laughed, and even walked a little. But by degrees the walks ceased, and

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then the drives grew less and less frequent, and, instead of talking, Granny would sit hour after hour silent in her chair, dozing fitfully, her knitting lying in her lap; or gazing before her with eyes which seemed to look past her present surroundings into a world beyond.

Dorothea saw it, and wondered, and at last grew so anxious that it was with infinite relief she welcomed the day when they were to turn their faces homeward.

Granny too seemed pleased at the prospect of being at home again, though she did not say much. She was very quiet on the journey, and before Yabsley was reached it was plain to see she was very, very weary, though she never once complained. Indeed, she scarcely spoke at all.

"We shall soon be home now," said Dorothea thankfully, as she helped her into the waiting carriage.

"Yes, soon be home now," repeated Granny softly. "Such a little way further to go."

At the moment Dorothea referred to the drive to the house from the station, but the next morning when they entered Granny's quiet room and found her lying still upon her pillows, she knew that the little way she had meant was the way she had travelled alone through the hours of darkness.

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“Such a little way for you, Granny dear,” sobbed Dorothea, “but oh, it has taken you so very, very far from me, and I am so lonely, so dreadfully lonely, and—and there is nobody now to care!”

## CHAPTER XI

### DOROTHEA MAKES UP HER MIND

*'Twas God ordained thy humble story;  
To be content, and smile, to thee belong.*

R. WALTON

**H**UGH POMEROY, looking shocked and remorseful, came home for the funeral.

"I wish now that I hadn't gone away so much," he said regretfully to Dorothea; "I daresay she felt lonely sometimes."

"I think she felt very lonely very often," said Dorothea candidly. In her grief she felt hard toward anyone who had caused pain or sorrow to her dear dead granny; and that Uncle Hugh had been selfish and neglectful no one could help seeing. Better feelings, though, prevailed presently, when she remembered how troubled her patient, unselfish granny would have been that anyone should blame Hugh on her account. "But she was always happy if other people were happy," she added. "She loved you to be doing what you liked best."

"She did, didn't she?" Uncle Hugh seized

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eagerly on the scrap of comfort. "Bless her! She was the best and dearest mother any man could have. I am sure she was never really happy after poor old Jack went away, and I have been frightfully sorry since that we all made such a fuss about that affair. If it hadn't been for us, she would have had him and your mother forgiven at once—or, at least, as soon as they had had a good scolding; and everyone might have been happy and comfortable. But Isabel and I stuck out, in our stupid pride, and we worked on Father's feelings till he was much more angry than he ever meant to be, poor old man, and—well, I am thankful Mother never knew all that was said in those wretched letters that came and went. I should have been ashamed for her to know. I am ashamed myself when I think of them. Dolly, my dear, think twice before you let your temper get the whip-hand of you, and you allow yourself to say things that will rise up and smite you ever after."

"I will try to," said Dorothea very soberly. "I shall always think of Father and Mother, and how unhappy they were, and Granny and—and Aunt Julia too, and Grandmamma Garland, and all the rest."

"And I expect they all visited their wrath on you, you poor little mortal, didn't they?" asked Uncle Hugh inquiringly. "And a pretty

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bleak time they must have given you, if I know anything of them."

"Yes," said Dorothea slowly; "it was bleak. That is just what it was. It was like living on a great lonely mountain without anyone to take you in, or care whether you lived or died—it was just 'bleak.'" And in her eyes there still rested the shadow of the past.

The next day Mrs Pomeroy was laid to rest beside her husband in the little burying-ground by the private chapel. Friends and neighbours came from near and far, but only the men of the families followed the coffin to the grave. But later on, when all the guests had gone, and Uncle Hugh was shut in his own room, Dorothea crept down the stairs and out of the gloomy, silent house.

In the park the rooks were cawing noisy 'good-nights,' and the blackbirds and thrushes sang as cheerfully as though they did not know or care that the kind heart which had always thought of them was stilled now for ever. To Dorothea it seemed heartless for anything to be cheerful and happy on that day.

Across the park she went, and down the little side-path bordered with may-trees, red and white and pink—they were all in bloom now, and the air was heavy with their scent—until she reached the little burying-ground. Across



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the green turf the white flower-crowned grave gleamed out startlingly ; the boards and all that was unsightly had been removed, and only the mound and the flowers remained to tell the story of that day. Dorothea sat down on the kerb of the next grave. She did not cry, for all her tears were shed for the time, and her heart felt numb with misery and grief. Her mind was full of anxieties, and she felt an unutterable loneliness.

What was to become of her ? Where could she go, and when, and how ? What would happen next ? Uncle Hugh would not live at the Manor, that was certain, and he would scarcely keep it open that she might go on living there.

“ Oh, Granny, Granny, I want to ask you things, and hear you speak to me again—there is no one, no one to help me ! Oh, Granny darling, I want you so, I want you so ! ” she cried, but only silence answered her.

She must have sat there for an hour before the sound of approaching footsteps brought her to her feet. Through the bushes she saw some of the maids coming to visit the grave too, so she slipped quietly away and out at a side gate before they caught sight of her. The path she took led her presently into the garden where her own little plot of ground lay. It

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was the first time she had been there since her tragic home-coming.

The old gardener was still at work, closing up some of the cold frames for the night. Dorothea was passing him with a smile and a brief "Good-night," for she felt in no mood for talk just then, but the old man straightened his bent back at sight of her, and his melancholy face brightened.

"Have you seen your rose, missie?" he asked eagerly, evidently pleased at the thought of her pleasure.

"My rose? Oh, no," she said indifferently; "I had forgotten all about it, I——" But as her eye fell on it her indifference died away, her voice and face changed. "Oh, Gardener, how beautiful! I never, never dreamed it would have grown so. I am so glad!"

The old gardener's face was aglow with pleasure.

"You must have taken a lot of care of it," she added gravely, tearing her eyes from the bunches of snow-white blossom and the soft green leaves to rest upon the old man's gratified face.

"Why, no, missie, nothing to speak of. They roses ain't hardly a bit of trouble, 'cept to keep the blight from 'em. Give 'em a spot they fancies, and they'll take care of themselves when once they've started. You've got

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to find out what they do like, that's all. But I don't know anything that gives back more in return for a bit of care than flowers do," he added tenderly, and he looked at those about him as though he loved them.

"To-morrow," said Dorothea, as she gently touched a spray with loving fingers, "to-morrow I will put some on Granny's grave. I—I wish she could have seen them," she added brokenly, with quivering lips. "She loved them, too."

"Ay, missie, the mistress loved them. She'd got a heart big enough to care for everybody and everything." The old man passed a work-worn hand across his dim eyes. "She'd got a way, the mistress had, of making you feel that you mattered something to her—and that means a brave lot. There isn't anybody, in my 'pinion, but what likes to feel they matters to somebody. We all felt that the mistress cared for us, and—and we'd do anything for her, and gladly, too."

Dorothea nodded. Her heart was so full she found it hard to speak. She loved the old man for his love of his mistress. "Thank you, Turner," she said tremulously, "and thank you for taking care of my rose for me. I should have lost that too if it hadn't been for you. Good-night! I—I'll see you again to-morrow."

The old gradener watched her until she was

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out of sight, then once more he passed his hand across his eyes. "Bless her! She's breaking her heart, poor little lady, and not a soul to take and comfort her. She's the very marrow of the poor mistress herself, she is, and I wish 'twas she that was following on here in the mistress's place. We'd feel then that we'd got somebody as'd care for us."

The next day Dorothea went to interview her uncle in his private room. She could not rest until she knew something about her own future.

"Uncle Hugh," she began. She was pale, and very grave, but she was composed and tearless. "Uncle Hugh, I don't know what is going to happen here, but I am wondering what I had better do—and where I can go!"

"Go? Do?" Hugh, who was a great deal more embarrassed than his niece, felt extremely uncomfortable, and he hated to feel uncomfortable. He had a warm heart, though, and a real affection for his brother's child. "You will stay here, of course. Why should you go anywhere else, or do anything?"

"But I—I think I ought to learn to—to earn my own living—to keep myself."

"Earn your living?" in a tone of amazement. "You? Why, you are well enough off, aren't you?"

"Well off? I haven't anything!" stammered

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Dorothea, colouring painfully. "But that doesn't matter," she hastened to add, fearing lest her uncle should think she was asking for help; "I love working."

"Nothing at all! Why, you will have five hundred a year, your grandmother's money—that she has left you! Isn't that enough, child?"

"Five—hundred—a year!" gasped Dorothea. "Five—hundred—a year! Do you mean—pounds, Uncle Hugh? Oh, it must be a mistake! I can't have——"

"Didn't you hear the will read?" he said almost impatiently.

"I heard the lawyer reading something—but I didn't listen. I couldn't understand him."

"Well, Dolly, you can understand this. Your grandmother left you enough to bring you in five hundred pounds a year for the rest of your life—unless you are foolish enough to lose it! Until you are twenty-one it will be in the hands of trustees—I am one—and you are to have spent on you as much as is needed, and the rest will accumulate until you are of age. Is that plain enough?"

Dorothea nodded. "Yes, Uncle Hugh," she said in a dazed voice; "only I can't quite take it in yet."

"Well, at any rate, don't let me hear any more

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talk about earning your own living, and that sort of rubbish."

"But I can't live here, Uncle Hugh—not that I should feel lonely," she added hastily. "I mean, you wouldn't want to keep the house open just for me, would you?"

For a moment Mr Pomeroy did not reply. Dorothea glanced at him anxiously; to her surprise he looked uncomfortable and embarrassed.

"Look here, Dolly," he said at last, his voice husky and rather tremulous. "I—I've got something to tell you, only keep it to yourself for a bit. I was going to tell the mother as soon as she came home from France, but—well, you know what happened. The truth is, I am engaged. I shall not be married just yet," he added hurriedly. "I am going to Paris next week, and to Scotland in August, and it won't be till after that—not till after Christmas, probably; so you see there is no hurry about settling anything. So"—with a sigh of relief at having got his secret off his mind, and at seeing a chance of postponing all worry as to Dorothea's future—"I'll tell you what we'll do. You shall just stay here quietly till I've talked things over with Joan—that is the name of your future aunt—Joan Dudley. Then, perhaps, we will arrange for you to go to school on the Continent later on, by way of



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finishing your education, and—and of course this will always be your home to come back to.”

“Thank you!” said Dorothea; but she was not overjoyed at the prospect. There was a feeling of uncertainty, of unreality, about everything. She could not feel satisfied. She summoned up all her courage and spoke out bravely. “It is very, very kind of you, Uncle Hugh, but I should feel I was in the way. Your—Miss Dudley might not like my being here, and I would rather——”

“Oh, but she would! I’ll talk to Joan, and—and, oh, it will be quite all right. I am sure it will. Don’t you worry yourself, Dolly. I’ll always look after you.”

But Dorothea could not help worrying herself. She thought a great deal about things, and the more she thought the more unhappy she grew. “I seem born to be in someone’s way. I’m always being a trouble to somebody,” she cried, as she sobbed herself to sleep; “and, oh, I wish I had someone to be a trouble to me! I mean—I wish I had someone to take trouble for!”

Then in the darkness there came to her the thought of Aunt Julia, alone in her dull little house.

For months past she had scarcely given her aunt a thought. All the excitement of the

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journey to France, all the novelty and charm, and the anxiety too, that she had experienced there, followed by the great trouble that had suddenly descended on her—all this, added to the long, unbroken silence of the past two years and more, had driven Miss Garland, and all connected with the old life, almost completely from Dorothea's mind.

Now, in her loneliness, it all came back to her, but with the unpleasantness forgotten, with all that was hard and unlovely wiped away. Only, what had held a charm for her before still held its charm—the garden with its robins and butterflies, the old laburnum-tree, the white rose-bush around her bedroom window, the little room itself—and suddenly she was filled with a great longing to go back to it all. She sat up in bed, her heart beating fast; a new and wild idea for the settling of herself, and her future had come to her. She would go back!

Perhaps, now that no one wanted her at Yabsley Park, Aunt Julia would have her again. She had said once, at the last, that she would find a home there if she were in need of one. She had not spoken very cordially, it is true, but Dorothea never expected cordiality from Aunt Julia, and remembering that last day, Dorothea felt hopeful. "She seemed to care, just at the end," she thought. "Perhaps

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she might even be glad to have me. I wouldn't be a trouble to her. I am bigger now and could help her, and"—oh, joyful thought!—"I shouldn't be any expense."

She jumped out of bed and, going to a drawer, searched in it till she found the little handbag she had carried the day she left Blybury, and, still in the corner of it, the little chip of stone from the window-sill.

"Oh, I must go back," she cried; "I must! Perhaps there will be a place for me. Perhaps I should fit in as well as the chip into the window-sill!"

Before breakfast she had written a third letter to her aunt, and posted it before her courage had time to waver. She did not tell her uncle what she had done. She meant to do so, but something checked her. "If Aunt Julia does not write to me, he would only think worse of her than ever, and I don't want him to do that," she argued with herself; and as it happened the day was one of such bustle and confusion that she scarcely saw her uncle at all. A telegram came for him asking him to be in London that night, and as he would not return to Yabsley before he went to France, he had a great many matters to arrange before he left, and Dorothea's future was not one of them. Indeed, in his mind that was already settled. She was to stay there. She loved

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the place, and she had her horse, and her garden, and friends at no great distance.

"You know you can invite as many as you like to stay with you," he said kindly; "or perhaps you would like to have a governess to live here with you?" But Dorothea shook her head. "I would rather be alone, Uncle Hugh, please," she pleaded. "Don't think about me; I shall be all right."

She wished she could tell him of her idea about going back to Aunt Julia, but he was already edging toward the door, impatient to be off. "Well, of course, Dolly, if you would rather; do just as you like. I only want you to be as happy as possible. So that is settled, then. If you do change your mind—or want advice, or—or anything, just trot in and talk to Miss Ferguson. She will help you. Good-bye, my dear! I must be off, or I shall miss my train. Take care of yourself, and let me have a line to say how you're getting on. Good-bye!" And with a last cheerful smile, Uncle Hugh was gone, but without leaving any address behind; and Dorothea was left to face her life under these new conditions.

She had said she would not feel lonely, not more lonely than she had done since her Granny's death; but during the days that followed she discovered her mistake. Uncle

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Hugh's lively presence and genial face had brought more cheerfulness to the house than she had imagined. He had talked to her as if she was his equal in age and understanding, and had given her plenty to do, and without her realizing it this had helped her a great deal.

Now that he was gone, and she was really alone, she grew to know what bitter loneliness really was. The solitary meals, the long, empty mornings, the dull afternoons and dreary evenings, weighed on her like a nightmare. Day after day she watched eagerly for the letter from Aunt Julia, the letter of welcome or rejection, the letter on which she thought her fate depended, the letter which never came.

A week passed, and another, and another. May had gone, and June was nearing its end when, unable to bear the suspense any longer, Dorothea one day started out to walk to Yabsley Station. It was scarcely likely that Guard Jeffreys was still on the express, but she would go and see—it was worth trying.

"I wish, oh, I wish I had thought of him before!" she said half-aloud, as she hurried along the sunny roads.

"Do you know the name of the guard on the express?" she demanded of a young porter, seated on a box on the platform, waiting for

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the train to be signalled. The youth ceased whittling his thumb-nails, and stared at her, speechless.

"It used to be Mr Jeffreys, but I am afraid he may have been moved," Dorothea added, trying to rouse him and at the same time not show her impatience.

"I dunno," he said at last; then, with an air of relief, he jerked his newly trimmed thumb in the direction of the signal-post. "You'll be able to see for yourself; train'll be here in a minute."

Dorothea turned away; she was hopeful, yet afraid to hope; and then, as the train drew up, and the first to step from it was her own old friend, a great cry of joy broke from her.

"Oh!—then you are still here! I am so glad; oh, I am so glad! You know me, don't you? Oh, you must know me!" she cried desperately, as he gazed at her in blank surprise. "I am Dorothea Pomeroy—don't you remember? You sent me a rose-bush. Oh, of course you remember!" as a light of recognition came into his eyes. "I knew you in a minute——"

"Ay, ay! I remember, missie; of course I do. But you are grown up into such a tall young lady—and I thought you had left these parts. I don't believe I'd have known you, missie, if you hadn't spoken to me."

His eyes took in her deep mourning, the



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thinness of her pale face, and the dark lines beneath her eyes, but he did not say anything.

"I haven't really altered," said Dorothea earnestly; "I am just the same inside—and, oh, I am so glad to see you again! I want so dreadfully to know if you have heard anything lately of my aunt, Miss Garland? You remember?"

"Yes, I remember," said Guard Jeffreys, and his face grew more serious. Dorothea saw the change at once, and a new fear thrilled her.

"You have heard bad news—I know you have! Please tell me! She—Aunt Julia—isn't——" she gasped, her pale face growing paler.

"Well, missie, Miss Garland isn't what you'd call well, not by a long way, I believe; but at the same time 'tisn't anything to be frightened about. I expect it is really her mind more than her body that's troubling her, her spirits telling on her health, so to speak. You see she's had a brave lot of trouble to face—but you know all about that, of course."

"No, I don't—I don't know anything!" cried Dorothea desperately; "she will not write to me! And I haven't heard a word about her since I saw you last!"

"Didn't you hear about the bank breaking, miss?"

Dorothea shook her head. "What bank?"

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"Why, the Nutshire Bank! They had a branch at Blybury, and your aunt and nearly everybody in Blybury had their money in it. To think of your never hearing about it! It happened about six months ago."

"I was in France then."

"Half the Blybury folk were ruined by it!"

"Ruined!" gasped Dorothea. "Is Aunt Julia ruined too?"

John Jeffreys nodded gravely. "Pretty nigh, I'm afraid. I heard that the trouble had pretty well broken her up."

The station-master bustled up the platform full of importance, and the guard had to go to him. Dorothea, stunned and bewildered by what she had heard, remained standing where he had left her.

Aunt Julia—nearly ruined!—then that was why she had not written! She could not offer her a home, for she had not enough to keep herself, and she was too proud to explain. But what would happen? What would become of her? She could not work, and she had no one to work for her!

The guard came hurrying back. Time was up. "Good-bye, missie," he said sympathetically; "I am vexed to have brought you bad news. I wish I hadn't to hurry away, but perhaps I shall see you again soon?"

"I hope so. I am very much obliged to

## A Cottage Rose

you; I must try to think what I can do. I must do something—but I can't think yet." She answered in a dazed, bewildered tone, scarcely knowing what she was saying.

All the way home her thoughts whirled round and round in a perfect maze of plans. With every few yards she covered, a new scheme cropped up in her mind.

Aunt Julia had no money, or very little. She, Dorothea, had plenty—more than she could possibly want. How could she make Aunt Julia accept some of it? She thought of a dozen different schemes, but none of them seemed good. She would ask Uncle Hugh to give her some of her money, some five-pound notes, and she would send them to her aunt anonymously. No; it would be more mysterious still if, somehow, a hundred pounds were paid in to Miss Garland's banking account every Christmas. A moment later, though, she remembered that Miss Garland probably had no banking account now.

Then, suddenly, when almost at her wits' end, a new idea came to her—a thrilling, absorbing, splendid idea. She would not send her money, she would go to her herself, and without telling her that she was coming!

Dorothea stood in the road and clapped her hands with excitement. "I will not send anything, nor write to say I am coming. I

## Dorothea Makes up Her Mind

will just go, and when I get there I will tell her I have come to live with her again. She took care of me all those years; now I will take care of her. If she won't let me, I can come back here again—but, oh, I hope she will, I do hope she will ! ”

## CHAPTER XII

### THE JOURNEY

If a thought comes quick of doing  
A kindness to a friend,  
Do it this very minute,  
Don't put it off, don't wait.  
What's the good of doing a kindness  
If you do it a day too late ?

WITH her new idea filling her mind, Dorothea's feet flew over the road home. Her heart thrilled with eagerness. Here was something to do ! Here was someone who needed her—someone to take care of. Now at last she would have a chance to repay Aunt Julia some of the care and trouble she had cost her—a chance of showing her that she had not been indifferent, or forgetful, in her luxurious surroundings.

It was not until she had nearly reached the lodge gates that her new hopes were dashed from the heights to the depths by the sudden remembrance that, after all, she was not free to please herself, to do as she liked ; that, until she had consulted her uncle, or her other trustee, or both, and obtained their permission, she was not at liberty to go.

## The Journey

At the disappointment, coming so close on her new delight, she nearly wept. "And I can't even get a letter to Uncle Hugh," she cried; "no one knows where he is, and there is no knowing when we shall!"—despondently. "Day after day, and night after night, Aunt Julia will go on feeling ill and worried, and I shan't be able to help her—and when I can it will very likely be too late."

Just for a moment she thought she would write to her and explain, but she quickly abandoned that idea. If Aunt Julia did reply, it would probably be to forbid her to come. And once having forbidden her, she would refuse to let her in, or to keep her if she went.

No, if Dorothea meant to carry her plan through, she must come upon her aunt without warning. It would be better to wait days, or even weeks, before going than to let Aunt Julia know.

As she toiled, hot, depressed, and tired, along the last sunny bit of the drive, she saw Edwards standing on the steps under the porch, gazing this way and that, evidently looking for someone. When she caught sight of Dorothea she came hurriedly to meet her.

"Oh, Miss Dorothea," she cried crossly, "I've been looking for you everywhere. Here's a telegram that came for you nearly an hour



## A Cottage Rose

ago, and we did not know where to find you, and I've been so anxious ; you have been gone so long——”

“ A telegram ! ” cried Dorothea, breaking in on the torrent of words. As she took it her hands shook. She had never received a telegram before, and it frightened her. She stood still in the hot sunshine to read it, but for a moment the words danced before her eyes. Edwards watched her eagerly.

“ Oh ! ” she cried at last in a tone of intense relief. “ It is from Uncle Hugh ! ” And she read it out : “ ‘ Expect me to-night to dinner, Pomeroy. ’ ”

Edwards looked very wise. “ I thought as much, miss. That's why I was so worried. You see it takes a good while to get the master's rooms ready, and dinner for him. I'll go and tell Mrs Dunn at once. ”

But Dorothea heard nothing ; the one thought that filled her mind was : “ He is coming—I can ask him to-night ! ” and already she had begun to picture herself arriving at Laburnum Cottage.

Somehow she felt little fear that her uncle would refuse her request. He was always so kind and easy-going, so ready to let people do what they wanted to do ; and though she never doubted his warm affection, she could not help feeling too that he felt it rather a

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## The Journey

tie having a big niece left on his hands. He had always been kindness itself to her, and she remembered this gratefully when she ran out to meet him. She was genuinely glad to welcome him back.

But Hugh Pomeroy had changed—Dorothea noticed it at once. He greeted her affectionately, but his usual heartiness was lacking; he was quiet and subdued; he almost seemed embarrassed and uneasy. When they met again at dinner the change in him had become so marked that Dorothea grew quite troubled. She was sure that he was worried about something, but she could not tell what.

More than once he looked across the table at her with troubled, anxious eyes, and more than once Dorothea, looking up, caught his eyes fixed on her.

“Dorothea,” he said at last, “haven’t you grown very much lately?”

In her thin black evening frock, she was certainly looking taller and more grown-up than she had a month or two ago. Her hair, instead of spreading over her shoulders, was plaited and tied with a ribbon at the nape of her neck; her face was thinner and wore a graver, older look. She had altered in many ways during those last few weeks.

She smiled at her uncle across the table, but her blue eyes were very serious. Anyone

## A Cottage Rose

more observant than Hugh Pomeroy would have seen that she was intensely nervous. "I don't know, Uncle Hugh," she answered soberly; "I think I may have grown a little taller—and I feel—oh, ever so much older!"

It almost seemed as though at her words a shade of relief crept into her uncle's eyes. "That comes of living alone in this dull place," he said quickly. And then, as though taking a plunge: "You know, Dolly, what would really be the best thing for you would be to leave this dull old place and have a year or so at a first-class finishing school in France. You would make some nice friends there, and—and—oh, well, you know, it would be good for you in no end of ways." He broke off abruptly. He could not bring himself to tell Dorothea that Miss Joan Dudley objected strongly to having a grown-up niece installed in her house, and had requested that Dorothea should have a home found her elsewhere.

In the presence of Dorothea's unconscious face and wistful eyes, Hugh Pomeroy felt his courage and his words fail him. He hated the task before him; he hated being obliged to send Dorothea away. She was his niece, John's daughter—motherless, fatherless, friendless. He was fond of her for her own sake too. She was a good little soul, he told himself, and it was rough luck on her to be turned out.

## The Journey

Dorothea, unconscious of everything but the one great desire filling her heart, came to his rescue and helped him out. "I—I should have liked it very much, Uncle Hugh, thank you," she said politely, "but——"

Her voice failed her as she came to put her plans into words; it sounded so ungrateful, so unkind. In her agitation she rose from her chair and went down the table to his side. "Uncle Hugh," she said, "I—I want to ask you to let me do something else. I want you to grant me a very great favour. I——"

"Well, child!"—nervously—"I will if I can. Tell me what it is." He was very anxious as to what the favour might be.

"Uncle Hugh, I have heard that Aunt Julia—Miss Garland—is ill and very unhappy. The bank has broken, and she has lost nearly all her money. I want you to let me go and live with her. Will you?" Then, as her uncle did not reply: "She was very good to me when I hadn't any one else," she added, "and now she is in dreadful trouble."

"You want to go back to that life?" asked her uncle incredulously; "to those people?"

"They are Mother's people."

For a moment silence reigned in the room, silence through which Dorothea's words seemed to echo and echo. A flash of relief showed in Hugh Pomeroy's eyes, then disappeared.

## A Cottage Rose

"But after the life you have led here, do you think you could stand the old one again? It will be worse to go back to after this. I think you don't realize what you are giving up."

"I shall miss everything dreadfully," Dorothea admitted, with a quaver in her voice; "but—but it isn't the same now Granny has gone; no one wants me here, and—and, Uncle Hugh, I think Aunt Julia will be glad if I go back to her. I would like to—if you don't mind. Aunt Julia would never ask me to come; if she was starving she wouldn't tell anyone, not even Uncle Baxter. She would shut herself up and starve first."

Uncle Hugh looked uncomfortable. "It can't be as bad as that," he said brusquely. "She can't be penniless—and people don't starve nowadays."

"But they do," persisted Dorothea, "sometimes. Do you mind if I go, Uncle Hugh? It isn't because I am fickle, or—don't care, or—or anything like that."

"No, child, no. I understand. No one could think that of you. Yes—go by all means if you feel you ought. Do exactly as you wish. I can trust to your common sense, my dear. All I want is for you to be as happy as ever you can. I like to be happy myself, and to see everyone else the same."

## The Journey

"Thank you, Uncle Hugh; then I may go as soon as I can get ready?"

"Yes, child. And about your money—we must make some arrangement about that. If your aunt is so poor, we ought to pay her well for keeping you. You just tell me what you want. Will you go on living in your aunt's little house, or would you like one of your own, and have her to live with you?"

Dorothea's face glowed with delight. This sounded like some wonderful make-believe come true. "Oh, Uncle Hugh, that would be lovely! Could I really have enough money for that?"

"Yes, child, I fancy that wouldn't break us, quite," with a good-humoured smile. But Dorothea looked thoughtful.

"Perhaps I had better go and see her first," she said more soberly; "I don't know yet that she will live with me at all——"

"Yes, that's the best way. Just go and see how the land lies, and then write to me, or to Simpson, the lawyer, and say what you want. Anything I can do, Dolly, I'll always do, like a shot, if you only let me know." He was enormously relieved at not having to tell her the disagreeable truth he had come to tell her. Things were, in his opinion, settling themselves beautifully. All the way to Yabsley he had been turning over and over in his mind



## A Cottage Rose

various ways of breaking his news so that it might not hurt her, and he had failed to find one. Now she herself had cleared the way for him, and he was thankful.

"You are a good little soul, Dolly dear; And—and if ever I can be of use to you, I'd like to be. You will write to me sometimes, won't you? I mustn't lose sight of you. Anything you wish to take from here you can. You would like your pony, wouldn't you? And—and of course you must have all the things in your own rooms; they were your father's—most of them—and the Mater loved them, and no one else will," he added sadly. "Strangers coming in wouldn't understand or care." He had risen now and was standing beside her, his hand resting on her shoulder. "And—God bless you, Dorothea! You are Jack's own child—and no mistake." Then, kissing her on the forehead, he went out, softly closing the door behind him, and Dorothea was left to face the future she had chosen.

She had her wish, or at least she had permission to do as she wished, and the first thing she did was to break into a storm of weeping—not for what she was going to, but for what she was leaving behind. The happy life, the years of peaceful days, the love that had been lavished on her—all gone now, or going; and gone the dear Granny who had made life what

## The Journey

it was. Uncle Hugh's words had touched her. She had missed affection so dreadfully these last months.

Drying her eyes, she strolled through the open window to her own little garden. Ah, she would have to leave that too, and Granny, lying sleeping in the little burying-ground beyond! On her rose-bush one last rose gleamed white in the moonlight. She gathered it and its cluster of buds and passed on to the burying-ground. On Mrs Pomeroy's grave soft green turf grew now, and a long cross of flowers stretched its full length. Stripping off a bud for herself, Dorothea put her white rose in the centre of the cross, among the rare ones already there.

"I was like that," she thought, "a cottage flower in among beautiful hot-house ones, and I shall never be anything more. I am sure I never shall. It is just as well I should go away." A little look of wistfulness crept into her eyes. "I wish I could ever be half as sweet and beautiful as they are. Everyone loves my little roses."

As she sat on the ground beside the grave the scent of the one rose carried her thoughts back over all the events in her life when those roses had played a part, and always they had brought sweetness and sunshine with them. "I wish I could do the same," she sighed

## A Cottage Rose

longingly. "I wonder—I wonder if I ever shall? I can try, at any rate, and I will try—try hard, too!"

A day or two later Hugh Pomeroy escorted Dorothea and her luggage to the station, and saw her off with more care for her comfort than anyone would have thought it in his nature to show.

Dorothea was taking nothing with her now but her clothes, yet she smiled as she compared her boxes, as they stood on the platform, with those she had brought with her five years earlier. "I shall have to leave most of them in the cloak-room," she laughed, "or Aunt Julia will never get over the shock, and that would be a bad beginning." But the laugh was very tremulous, and had little mirth in it. Now that it had come to the actual parting—to leaving for ever the home that had been such a happy home to her, and the grounds, the gardens, the servants, and dogs and horses, and all the rest she had grown to love so—it seemed a grim choice that she had made. Now, too, that she was actually starting on her adventure, she felt very frightened and lonely. To give up her warm-hearted, good-natured uncle for Aunt Julia, of whom, now that she came so near to meeting her again, all the grimmest and most unlovely recollections came pouring into Dorothea's mind, seemed foolish,

## The Journey

and she was almost tempted to beg her uncle to let her change her plan!

"I must not cry. I must not, I must not," she kept repeating almost frantically in her fear of doing so.

She tried hard to think, not of the parting, but of the weather, the porter, the labelling of her boxes—anything to distract her mind; and, but for her paleness and the look in her eyes, no one would have guessed how greatly she was suffering. Then at last, when she was almost at the end of her endurance, the train ran in, and Uncle Hugh, glad of anything to do to fill up those last trying minutes, bustled to and fro until he had found a comfortable compartment that Dorothea could have to herself; and in it he arranged her rug and her cushion, her lunch-basket and her flowers, and rearranged them, and said and did the same thing over and over again, until the last minutes had spun themselves out, and the panting, snorting engine was hurrying away with Dorothea to her new life, and the grunting motor-car carrying Hugh Pomeroy to his—and their ways had parted once more.

And then, at last, Dorothea felt that she might let her feelings have their way for a while, and, as on that June day, which seemed a lifetime ago, she wept and wept until she could weep no more.

## A Cottage Rose

"I suppose partings are always sad," she thought, raising her head at last and taking a look about her. "I wonder if people are ever quite happy? I was miserable when I went down the line, and now I am miserable when I am going up, and yet everything is different, and I am different." The difference was so great that she forgot her sorrow in the interest of comparing the journeys.

On the way down she had, by Aunt Julia's orders, sat primly in the middle of a close, dusty, third-class carriage, with both windows shut, not daring to open either. Now she was comfortably settled in a first-class corner seat, with a cushion at her back. She remembered still what she had endured from want of air until the friendly guard had come to her relief, and at the recollection she leaned forward to the wide-open window beside her and held her hot cheeks up to the breeze. This time, though, no kind guard came to cheer and console her—evidently Guard Jeffreys had been moved or was off duty to-day. "I suppose one can't have everything," she sighed; "that day I had only my guard, to-day I have so much!"

Her glance fell on her flowers and book, her pretty dust-cloak, and the hat lying on the seat beside her—such a different hat from the one she had worn that other day. True, it

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was black, and not even lightened by a purple ribbon—but, oh, the difference! From a dainty bag lying on her lap she took a silver-topped bottle of Eau-de-Cologne, and bathed her hot forehead and smarting eyes. The refreshing scent filled the compartment, overpowering for a while the scent of the flowers tucked in her waistband.

“Everything is as different as though it had all been changed on purpose to make me feel the difference,” thought Dorothea, glancing about her; “everything but me—and Aunt Julia—and this!” From her arm she took another handbag, a shabby, cheap little brown thing, and from the corner of it a chip of brownish stone. “You will fit in again,” she said in a little choky voice, as she looked at it lying in her palm, “but I wonder if I shall? You are a bit of it, but—well”—drawing herself up and straightening her shoulders—“I am going to try,” and her voice took on a determined tone; “and I am going to try hard too!”

The very determination seemed to raise her spirits, and one by one all the things she had to be thankful for came back to her mind. “If I am not happy I ought to be ashamed of myself. I can go and help Aunt Julia, and not be a drag on her any longer, and I can show the Baxters I am not ungrateful, and—and



## A Cottage Rose

I'll take care of Aunt Julia if she is ill—and will let me," she was obliged to add; "and, oh, I shall be so glad to have something real to do, and—why!"—springing to her feet and thrusting her head out of the window, "if that isn't Halford Church tower, and the bridge, and, oh, yes, this is the station, and there are the flower-beds, full of geraniums and daisies and lobelias, just exactly as when I left them! How strange it all is—and how—how homey! I wonder if I shall see anyone I know? Why—yes, I do believe——" Dorothea sat down hurriedly, and turned her back to the window. Mr Tom Baxter, older, thinner, shabbier, but undoubtedly Mr Tom Baxter, was walking down the platform toward her!

It was not likely that he would recognize her, altered and grown as she was, but Dorothea kept her face steadily turned away, pulled the brim of her hat well down over her eyes, and became absorbed in the contents of her hand-bag. She was not going to run any risks. Her ears were alert, though. She heard his footsteps coming nearer and nearer; he passed so close to her open window that she could have touched him had she put her hand out. Then he was gone. Dorothea actually shivered with excitement until the sound of his footsteps had died away. Only then did she venture

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to peep cautiously out of the window. He was mounting the stairs to the exit.

"Then he is not going back to Blybury by this train," she thought with a great sigh of relief. The relief sent her spirits up. Then the engine whistled, and she was carried on the last stage of her journey.

With flushed cheeks and glowing eyes she gazed out at every well-remembered landmark. "We are nearly there—we are nearly there," she gasped, half-frightened, half-delighted. "The very next station is Blybury, and then——"

"The very next—the very next, is Blybury, Blybury," the revolving wheels beat out the words; the engine puffed them out in short, panting gasps, "Is Blybury, Blybury."

Now that she was so close, all the difficulties that lay in her way pressed heavily on her. It had all seemed so romantic, exciting, easy, when she was at a distance, but now! In her agitation she passed landmark after landmark without heeding them, until the slowing-down of the engine brought her to herself.

"We are come!" she cried, "we are come!" and sat back in her seat, feeling that she could not possibly face the task she had set herself. "Oh, I can't get out, I can't go to the house—I—I simply can't go to her and tell her I have come to stay. Supposing she won't let me in!

## A Cottage Rose

What shall I do?—Oh, why did I come? I'll go right back—no, I won't, I'll go on to the next station, and then I'll write to Uncle Hugh and explain. He'll understand; I will go to school—and send Aunt Julia some money instead——”

A porter turned the handle and flung the door open. “Blyb'ry! Getting out here, miss? Any luggage?” he asked politely, probably scenting a tip from this well-dressed, nervous-looking little first-class passenger.

“N-yes,” stammered Dorothea, obliged to say something, but he had already read the label on her hat-box, and was lifting it out. “There is more luggage in the van,” she said meekly, “two boxes and a portmanteau; they are all grey, and all have ‘D. H. P.’ painted on them in white.”

“Yes, miss,” with an extra touch to his cap; and he marched away in search of the things, while Dorothea collected her bag, and flowers, and cushion.

Before she stepped down on to the platform she had a long look up and down its length. She was dreadfully afraid that someone would recognize her, and go on ahead and tell Aunt Julia. But Blybury Station was as sleepy as ever, and except for herself and the porter, and one or two strangers, there was no one about.

## The Journey

With her mind greatly relieved, she hurried along to identify her belongings, and then, with her cloak-room ticket safe in her purse and her two bags on her arm, she walked out of the station and set her face once again toward Laburnum Cottage.

## CHAPTER XIII

### BACK IN THE OLD HOME

If the world seems cool to you,  
Kindle fires to warm it ;  
Let their comfort hide from view  
Winters that deform it.  
Hearts as frozen as your own  
To that radiance gather ;  
You will soon forget to moan,  
“ Ah ! the cheerless weather ! ”

LUCY LARCOM

MISS JULIA GARLAND lay on her bed with her face turned to the wall. She lay with her face to the wall that she might not see the dirty windows, the limp curtains, and the dust on everything.

For Miss Garland to be in bed after six in the morning showed that something unusual was the matter, but for her to be lying on it, fully dressed, late in the afternoon, showed that something very wrong indeed was the matter.

Occasionally a stifled groan broke from her ; but whether it was caused by pain of body or of mind was more than she herself could have told.

From the time when the bank had smashed,

## Back in the Old Home

and she had learnt that she was ruined, she had shut herself up in her house, and if she suffered, or what she suffered, no one knew but herself. Others had suffered too; nearly all Blybury, in fact, had been hurt by the crushing blow. Some had found help from their friends, others had found consolation in the sympathy of others; all had found some relief in talking out their troubles, and listening to each other's woes—but not Miss Garland.

From the first she had refused to discuss the matter with anyone, and she certainly would not have accepted help from anyone. She neither gave sympathy nor asked for it. Sympathy did not pay the rent, nor fill her larder, she told herself, and retired into her house—which fortunately was her own—and closed the door to everyone. She knew that she had never been popular; she never made friends with anyone, and she refused to believe that anyone felt really sorry for her.

“They only come poking in, with their talk, talk, talk, because they want to find out if I’ve got anything left at all,” she snapped, talking aloud, as had become her habit the last year or so. “Many of them would be glad if I hadn’t, and had to go to the workhouse.” And when she had made the same cruel speech, or something like it, to those who did manage to see her, they left her to herself. Even



## A Cottage Rose

when she was ill she refused help, and offers of company simply made her angry.

"I prefer to be alone," she said sharply, "and I am too weak to argue; so if you will kindly leave me alone I shall feel obliged. Please close the door after you when you go out, then I shan't have to get up to do it."

Such was the feeling that filled her during the long, long weeks before Dorothea returned to Blybury. Then, by degrees, there were other reasons for her not wanting to get up. She grew faint from want of proper food, but it was too much trouble to get any, or to cook it. If she went downstairs she only saw how badly her house needed cleaning and tidying, and that made her more miserable still. She had not yet grown indifferent to muddle, or to dust. They vexed her eyes, though she had not spirit enough left to take broom and duster and drive them away.

On that particular afternoon she felt more than usually depressed, and out of heart with everything. She was angry with herself and fate. Presently she heard a knock at the front door, but she did not move. She had grown used by that time to hearing people knock and knock again, and finally go away. If she let this one go on knocking, he or she, whoever it was, would do the same. So she buried her face in her pillow again, and,

## Back in the Old Home

remembering thankfully that the front door was locked, she tried once more to banish thought and feeling in sleep.

To Dorothea, with her vivid recollection of every detail of her old home, the change in everything came with a painful shock; the steps were neglected, the knocker unpolished, the windows dirty. "Aunt Julia must be very ill, or she must have gone away," she thought, dismayed. "I am sure no one has gone in or out of this door for days and days." Dust, leaves, and scraps of paper had collected against it in quite a large heap. "And she can't know that the bell is broken or she would have had it mended; anything of that sort used to worry her dreadfully!"

The downstairs window was closed, and the blind was raised only half-way. These details would not have troubled Dorothea, but the sight of the dead and dying plants, and the dust lying thick on the table in the window, did so, and seriously too.

She could wait no longer. She had already knocked three times and received no answer, so, with a determined but very quaking heart, she made her way round to the back. Here the sight of a milk-can standing on the step reassured her a little, and she went up and knocked at the door boldly. Again she waited; again she knocked; again no answer came.

## A Cottage Rose

Something was certainly wrong, she decided. Perhaps Aunt Julia was too ill to leave her bed. If so, the knocking would worry her dreadfully and make her cross. There seemed but one thing left to do, and Dorothea did it—she went in without being told she might. She turned the handle, and to her great relief found that the door was not locked. “I’d have broken a pane of glass and opened the window if I couldn’t have got in any other way!” she said bravely, though she felt very quaky even at the mere thought of such a step.

Once in the kitchen, she stood and looked about her. From the appearance of it, Aunt Julia might certainly be away. There was no fire in the stove, no sign of a meal, no preparation for one. The windows were closed and very dirty, the floor was unswept, and the stove full of grey ashes. Over everything was an air of neglect.

“It will be very awkward if she is away,” thought Dorothea ruefully; “but Aunt Julia would never have gone and left the back door unlocked; she would have shut the shutters too!”

When she had arrived at that conclusion, a new fear came to her. Suppose Aunt Julia were dead—in the house alone! Nobody would know perhaps for days! For a moment she felt sick and faint with the horror of the

## Back in the Old Home

thought. Then she told herself she was foolish, ridiculous ; she remembered that there was only one milk-can on the step. If the boy who left it had seen yesterday's milk-can, and the day before's, still standing there, he would have raised an alarm.

" Perhaps she is so ill she can't get down to light a fire, or see to anything ! Oh, poor Aunt Julia, I am so glad I came ! "

Without giving herself time for further thought, Dorothea made her way through the house. " Aunt Julia ! " she called gently as she went. " Aunt Julia ! where are you ? May I come in ? "

Miss Garland, lifting her aching head to try and find a cooler spot on her pillow, heard the voice, and thought she must have been dreaming. " If I could get that child out of my mind it would be something to be thankful for ! " she said fretfully. " Ever since that last letter of hers came I've dreamed of her every night ; I wish I'd never read it. It's always, ' Aunt Julia, Aunt Julia, take me in ; I want to come home to you ! ' As if she would really want me, or want to come back here again ! I expect she had been naughty, and they had punished her, and she was put out. "

With a bitter little laugh, Miss Garland turned over to her other side, to try to find rest that way. " Oh, my head—oh, my poor

## A Cottage Rose

head!" she groaned. "I wonder if it would be better if I had a cup of tea—no, it is too much trouble. I don't want it badly enough to go down and get it."

"Aunt Julia! may I come in? I am Dorothea!" This time the voice sounded so real and so close, that for a moment Miss Garland lay, afraid to open her eyes or move. The voice was not the pleading, wailing voice of her dreams, but clear and bright and cheerful, with a note of happy assurance in it which overcame her weakened body and broken spirit.

"Aunt Julia—you won't be cross with me for coming, will you? Something told me that you were ill, and I came to see if I could help you. I longed to come, and I thought perhaps you might be glad of me to do little errands, and odds and ends. You will let me stay, won't you, Aunt Julia?" And she bent down and kissed her aunt's hot, thin cheek. All her old fear and awe had apparently slipped from her. She forgot all her old snubbings and humiliations. She had learned so thoroughly the new lessons learned by her life with her Granny, the lessons of affection, of confidence, of the joy of speaking out without fear; and as she bent over her aunt she talked to her as she would have talked to that dear dead Granny—and Miss Garland did not snub her.

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"Dorothea?" she questioned, still scarcely able to believe her senses. "Is it really you, or——"

"No, it isn't 'or'; it is really me, Aunt Julia! Me, my very own self! Don't you recognize me?"

"You have improved—you have grown a great deal. I had forgotten that you would be such a big girl by this time, and—yes, you have improved, child."

It was a great admission for Aunt Julia to make, but it did her good.

"I am ever so strong and well," said Dorothea cheerfully, "and I have come back to take care of you for twice as many years as you took care of me."

Miss Garland shook her head. "It is no use pretending," she said; "I'd keep you if I could, and be glad to, but—but I can't keep myself even. I don't know yet what's to become of me. Not that that matters to anybody but myself; nobody cares, and I don't care—at least, I shall learn not to in time; but you——" And then the hardness and the bitterness gave way and the tears came rushing forth.

Dorothea fell on her knees beside the bed. "You mustn't say that, Aunt Julia! It isn't so. I care—I care very much. You are all I have." And throwing her arms about the



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bony, rigid figure, she drew her close until the brown hair and the grey mingled, and cheek rested against cheek.

"Aunt Julia, don't worry any more about money. I have enough for us both. You shared yours with me when I hadn't anything, and now I am going to share mine with you. I have more money than I want, but I haven't any home, and if you won't have me I shall have to go to strangers; but, Aunt Julia, do please let me stay with you, and—and I *will* try to be good!" A smile gleamed through the wistfulness of her eyes.

Then the poor tired aunt, too weak to fight any longer against happiness, put up her hands and drew the pretty, eager face down to her own, and kissed it as she had never done in her life before. "I always did love you, child," she said sadly; "though I believe I tried not to. I never knew, though, how much I cared until you went away—I have never been happy since."

And Dorothea with a joyful cry threw her arms around her again. "Oh, Aunt Julia, I am so glad, so glad! I have never felt so glad in all my life before!"

A little while later Dorothea, with one of her aunt's big aprons fastened over her pretty frock, ran blithely down to the kitchen. She was going to light the fire and put on some

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water to boil for tea ; then after that she was going to tidy the house a little, prepare her own room, and get her luggage up from the station. " And, oh," she cried joyfully, " there is no end to all I am going to do ! "

But once the fire was really burning and the kettle set over it, she first of all ran up to her own old bedroom, and taking the little chip of stone from the bag, she leaned out and slipped it into its old place in the window-sill.

" We have both come back to fit into our places," she said softly, and leaning out she gathered a spray of her roses and fastened them at her breast.

Miss Garland, bewildered, excited, and happier in her heart than she had been for years, rose from her bed and began to make herself neat. As she looked at herself in the glass, and at her neglected room, she felt ashamed of both. She had on her shabbiest old dress and a soiled collar, and her hair was unbrushed.

" Whatever must the child have thought of me ? " she thought in dismay, and forthwith tore off dress and collar, and pouring some water into the basin, well bathed her face and eyes.

" There, I feel fresher now ; but oh, dear, how shaky and weak I am ! " A tap sounded at the door. " Well ? " Then, as an after-thought, " Come in ! "

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"I only wanted to ask," called Dorothea through the key-hole, "if you would like your tea brought up here to you?"

Miss Garland was shocked at the thought of being treated as an invalid. "Bless you, no, child!" she cried, opening her bedroom door; "I am coming down in a few minutes to try to set the house a bit straight. I am vexed you should have seen it in such a state—after what you've been accustomed to. Can you find a spot where we can have our tea?"

"Oh, yes," said Dorothea hurriedly, "I'll find a spot," and flew downstairs again. She wanted to get several things done before Miss Garland descended. "I shan't be able to do much cleaning now," she thought, as she glanced round the neglected little kitchen, "but the fire makes it look more cheerful." She had raised the blinds and opened the window, letting in the sunshine and sweet air. Then she went to the duster drawer. "They are sure to be kept in the same place," she smiled to herself—"the same dusters too, perhaps"; and she laughed as she drew out one of the familiar grey check squares. "Same old dusters, same old everything—except Aunt Julia. Oh, isn't it all lovely? It is like a story!" And she danced round the kitchen with joy.

With a few quick movements she wiped over

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the tops of the most prominent bits of furniture where the dust was most conspicuous. Then, with sudden inspiration, she picked up the little round table that stood in the kitchen window, and carried it out to the garden.

A white butterfly flitted past her, then another and another. "Plenty of 'cabbages' about here still," she murmured. "Oh, isn't it all like a dream? Here I am back again as though I had never been away, and everything is the same, and yet everything is different!"

She could not stay, though, to look about her. She wanted to get the tray ready and the table laid, and the chairs and mats out, before Miss Julia should get down. She would be sure to say, "Oh, don't bother; we will have our tea in here to-day." But if it is all ready for her she can't say anything—and I know it will be better for her," murmured Dorothea. "If she is indoors she will be worrying all the time at the sight of the rusty grate and the dirty windows, and the dust on the dressers; out here the grass needs cutting, but that is all."

Miss Garland must have known to a second almost how long her kettle would take to boil, for she came into the kitchen just as its lid rattled for the first time. Dorothea saw her look around her, and saw too the shade of

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disappointment which crept over her face when she saw no tea-table ready.

"Oh, you have carried the tray into the parlour! I had forgotten," with just a trace of her old manner. "Of course you're accustomed to having it in the drawing-room now."

Dorothea did not reply, but tucking her arm through her aunt's she led her out to the old laburnum-tree. "There, that's where I have laid it!" she said triumphantly. "Do you remember, Aunt Julia, when we had that tea-party out here before? I have thought about it so often, and I felt I couldn't wait another day; besides, it may rain to-morrow. Now you sit down and rest while I run in and bring out the teapot and kettle. The cosy is in the same place, I expect. Is it the same cosy, Aunt Julia?"

"No, it is *not* the same cosy!" cried Miss Garland with feigned indignation; "this is the second new one I have had since you went away."

"Oh! I am sorry; I liked that old one. I am so glad you haven't had a new tea-set—and you have kept my old mug. I have brought it out to use. Do you mind, Aunt Julia?"

Miss Garland shook her head, for there was a something in her throat which prevented her speaking; and in her heart was such happiness as she had never known before. Dorothea was back again, back of her own free will and

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choice, and, seemingly, glad to be. No, there was no seeming about it; no one could doubt Dorothea's real pleasure.

"Aunt Julia," she said, as she put down the teapot, and arranged over it the new knitted cosy, "are the robins here still?"

"Oh, yes! They come to be fed every day—at least"—a faint flush showed on Miss Garland's sallow cheek—"they did—until just lately."

"The darlings! Oh, yes, look, Aunt Julia! They have actually come for their tea already. How soon they found us out! Oh, you dears—and tamer than ever, too! I must seem quite a stranger to them, but they have no fear."

"No, they show no fear." Then, more slowly, "I think that was why I took to them. They came to me just as if—as if I was—just as they would to anybody. Will you pour out the tea, dear? I think it has been infusing long enough." Dorothea almost jumped in her chair. Never, even in her most ambitious moments, had she dreamed of being allowed to manage Aunt Julia's teapot, and though she quaked inwardly her face beamed with pride at the honour.

"You take one lump of sugar, and two drops of milk put in first, don't you? Granny liked the milk put in first, too. Is that strong enough?"



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"Yes, thank you, it is very nice." Miss Garland leaned back in her chair and sipped her tea gratefully. She was really glad of it. She found, too, that after weeks without any appetite she was quite hungry again.

"Cook packed me such a big lunch, and I never ate any of it, so I put it out on plates for tea," said Dorothea, holding out a plate of sandwiches in one hand and one of dainty little cakes and patties in the other. She looked at her aunt with some of her old nervousness. Would she refuse to touch anything from Yabsley Park? But Miss Garland, after only the faintest of hesitation, accepted one of the patties.

"I can't cut bread and butter nicely. I get it so thick," said Dorothea, looking ruefully at the clumsy slices.

"I like it thick," said Miss Garland. She was ashamed to say how long she had gone without food, and how hungry she was. Already she saw how weak-minded and foolish she had been. "You who always prided yourself on your strength of mind!" said her conscience scornfully; "you who always thought it so easy for others to bear their troubles and show a proper spirit! Where was your courage when troubles came upon you?"

Dorothea's mind was filled with happier thoughts. "It is so nice to see it all again,"

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she sighed contentedly. "Did the laburnum have much blossom on it this year, Aunt Julia?"

"Oh, yes, and such a litter it made on the grass when it fell!"

"Ah, well, next year you will have me here to pick it up. Do you remember my black overall?" Dorothea laughed softly to herself at the thought of that hideous garment.

Miss Garland opened her lips as though to speak, then closed them again. Her eyes wore almost an apologetic look, her face was full of trouble. "I—I shall not be here—next year." The words came out at last with a rush. "I—I am leaving in the autumn."

"Leaving?—here? Oh, no, Aunt Julia!" In her amazement Dorothea cried out, incredulous; but almost in the same breath she understood. Miss Garland was very poor now. "But, aunt Julia, now I have come we—we shall have enough—between us?" She felt very nervous at making such a suggestion, wondering how her aunt would take it. Miss Garland, though, had not heard what she said. "I—I have sold it," she said at last abruptly; "no one knows it yet—but me."

"Sold it! Oh, Aunt Julia, and you love it so! Can't you give back the money?—let some of my money go to buy it back? You must not part with this house; you will never

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be happy anywhere else. The person who bought it would let you have it again."

Miss Garland shook her head drearily. "Oh, no, there is no hope of that. He has been wanting it for years. He has always wanted to build a row of houses along here, but he could not get on while this house and garden stood in the way—and I wouldn't give them up. He is happy at last, though. He has got it all now, and I have to clear out at Michaelmas. It is hard, especially now you are back, and we might have been so comfortable." And Julia Garland no longer attempted to hide her tears. Dorothea choked back her own bravely. "Don't cry, Aunt Julia. Try not to mind," she pleaded, though her heart was heavy with her own bitter disappointment. "We shall be sure to find a little house somewhere that we shall like." But the thought of leaving for ever the laburnum-tree and her own dear white rose-bush, and the garden and the robins, was too much for her.

"Oh, whatever will the robins do?" she cried; "they will be turned out of their homes, and they will miss us—and the rose-bush and the laburnum will be cut down! Oh, Aunt Julia, Aunt Julia, why didn't I come in time?" She sat down on the grass beside her aunt and buried her face in her gown.

"It's all right," she said, but with an audible

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little sniff or two. "I—I shall be better in a minute, and to-morrow we will start out to find a house that no one can turn us out of as long as ever we choose to stay. Oh, it will be all right presently, Aunt Julia—but at first——"

## CHAPTER XIV

### A COTTAGE BY THE SEA

It is easy to love when we feel loving; it is hard to love when we do not feel loving; but those alone who love when it is hard to love have learned the meaning of love.

**W**HEN Dorothea spoke so lightly of getting another house to suit them, she spoke with the cheerfulness of ignorance. If either of them had had any experience of changing houses they would have known that it would be no easy task to find a cottage to suit their needs, and at the same time please Miss Garland, who had lived in her own house all her life, and thought there was no other in the world to equal it. She was weak and nervous too, and inclined to worry over everything, so Dorothea had no easy time during the days which followed.

“It seems to me,” she sighed, “that as soon as I settle down anywhere, and think I am going to be there for years and years, I always have to turn out again! The world seemed full of dear, pretty little cottages, until we wanted

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one, and now they have all vanished—all, I mean, that could possibly suit us. I suppose the nice ones are always filled. But, oh, I do wish there was one somewhere, and that we could find it!" And she sighed again, very heavily this time, for with every fruitless journey they made Miss Garland grew more despondent and irritated. She was sure that changing houses was the most dreadful experience in the world.

The prospect certainly was not cheerful, for the time was rapidly drawing near when they would have to turn out from where they were, and so far they had nowhere to turn in.

"We shall have to put the furniture into the road and sleep under a hedge," snapped Miss Garland crossly, as they returned from another fruitless expedition; "or go into lodgings, which in my opinion is worse!" She was very, very tired and miserable. She bitterly regretted having sold her house, and knew that she had only her own obstinacy to blame for it. If she had but answered Dorothea's letter, in which she asked to be allowed to come again and live with her, she need never have parted with her property. It was too late now to recover it, but the regret was with her night and day. That night she broke down altogether and wept.



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"I feel I'd like to cry too," thought Dorothea as she crept about on her aching feet, getting supper; "but it wouldn't do for us both to. Oh, dear, I wish we carried our houses about on our backs, or could build wooden houses and dump them down anywhere! I'd have mine by the sea somewhere. The sea!" With the thought of it her mind flew straight to Guard Jeffreys. Years ago he had told her that he had a cottage by the sea. Why had she not thought of him before? True, he lived some distance away, but that seemed nothing now. They had long despaired of finding a house near at hand. At any rate she would try to see him, and inquire. If he did not know of a house at Porth Freath, he might know of one somewhere else, for he travelled so much, and saw so many places and people.

She would go that very day and try to see him.

She did not mention her new hopes to her aunt, lest they should only prove a disappointment, but early the next day, with some excuse of errands to be done, she put on her hat and went out alone.

"Of course he may have left Porth Freath, or he may be moved to another line, and I shall not find him after all," she told herself, trying not to allow herself to hope too much as she hurried along to the station. But in spite of it all she felt a sense of bitter dis-

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appointment when the train drew up and a strange guard descended from the van.

She was so disappointed, and so completely at a loss what to do without him, that she could not make up her mind to go away and leave things as they were. It was all so hopeless and worrying. Something had to be done, and there seemed to be nobody but herself to do it. Miss Garland had long since fallen out with Uncle Tom and Aunt Ann Baxter, and would not hear of consulting them in her dilemma. In fact, she rather enjoyed mystifying them.

Dorothea turned away, then hesitated, walked up and down the platform once or twice, started for home, then finally turned back again, and marching right up to the guard, addressed him boldly before her courage had time to cool any further.

"Can you tell me——" she began. But at that moment a nervous old gentleman came up to ask the guard a question.

"Can you tell me——" Dorothea began again as soon as the old gentleman had moved off. The guard wheeled round and touched his cap to the little lady who was appealing to him with such anxious, earnest eyes. "Can you tell me," said Dorothea for the third time, "if Mr John Jeffreys, who used to be the guard on this train, has been moved, or——"

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The strange guard looked a little surprised at her question, but he answered readily enough. "No, miss, he is only having his holiday. He will be back next week."

Dorothea's face became wreathed in glad smiles. "Oh, I am so glad!" she said fervently. Then, fearing that she might have seemed impolite, and have hurt the strange guard's feelings, she added, "I wanted to speak to him, to ask him if he knew of any nice cottages, that was all. We are old friends, and I thought he might be able to help me. Does he still live at Porth Freath?"

The new guard smiled good-humouredly. "Yes, miss, he's settled there. I don't think he'll move again. He'll be having his pension soon. Can I give him a message, or a letter? But a letter by post would reach him quicker than I could take it. He isn't going away anywhere for his holiday. He says the best change he can have is to stay at home!" And the guard laughed amusedly. But Dorothea was far too much absorbed in her thoughts to laugh too.

"Of course I can write! Why didn't I think of it before! I will go straight home and get my letter posted in time to go out by the early post. If you will give me Mr Jeffreys' address I shall be much obliged. Why I'm in such a hurry," she explained gravely, "is

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because my aunt and I have to leave our own house in a week or two, and we haven't been able to find one that we like, and—well, it is really getting very serious ! ”

“ Yes, miss, it seems like it, and I expect you are getting to feel worried about it. Well, Mr Jeffreys may know of one ; he's always got his eyes open, so to speak. There's a nice little place at Porth Freath itself, a very snug little place it is, with a nice bit of garden and an orchard. It was to let a week or two ago, but whether it is now, or not, I can't tell you. ‘ Harbour Cottage ’ is the name of it. It might be as well to mention it to him when you're writing, miss.”

“ I will,” cried Dorothea eagerly. She was immensely taken by the name and the thought of the orchard and garden, and most of all by the fact that all were in Porth Freath. “ Oh, I do hope it is not taken !—but it is almost sure to be,” she sighed ; “ all the nice ones are. Good-bye, and thank you very much ! I will go home as fast as I can and write my letter.” She held out her hand and smiled at her new friend. “ I hope I haven't hindered you,” she added politely.

“ Oh, no, miss, not at all. I'm glad if I've been of any use. I'll tell Mr Jeffreys I saw you. What name, miss ? ”

“ Dorothea Pomeroy. Good-bye ! ” But she

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had only moved away a few paces when she hurried back again. "I suppose you don't know what the rent of Harbour Cottage is, do you?" she asked anxiously. "I hope it isn't very high."

"It's fourteen pounds a year, miss, and cheap it is, too. Here in Blybury it would be five-and-twenty, every penny of it."

"Fourteen pounds," thought Dorothea as she hurried homeward. "Well, we can afford that. Aunt Julia surely won't mind taking that much from me. If she liked she could make a little by selling the fruit from the orchard, and we could keep fowls, and we ought to be able to catch our own fish!"

Her spirits were higher than they had been for a long time. She had great faith in her guard. If he took a thing in hand he generally managed it, somehow; and by the time she reached Laburnum Cottage she had a lovely plan mapped out in her mind.

Harbour Cottage was the house that had been standing all this time waiting for them; of that she felt quite sure. It was their home, but, hard though it would be to keep silent, she would not sing its praises to her aunt. She would not even mention it. If she did Miss Garland might expect too much, and be disappointed when she saw it. It would be hard to keep, but she would keep it as her own

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beautiful secret, and Aunt Julia should have a lovely surprise!

It was indeed very, very difficult to manage—more difficult than Dorothea had dreamed, for letters had to be written and received without Miss Garland's knowledge, and Dorothea had to talk and plan and listen to her aunt's despairing grumbles without letting one hint escape her of the matter which chiefly filled her own mind. But fortunately for Dorothea the strain did not last long. John Jeffreys wrote to her by return of post. Yes, there were four or five cottages to let in Porth Freath, and Missie and her aunt had better come right away down to have a look at them before they got snapped up!

"But I have to confess to Aunt Julia first," groaned Dorothea, "and coax her into going."

Weeks of unsuccessful house-hunting had taught Miss Julia to clutch at any straw and not to expect perfection. The knowledge that in a few days now she had to turn out of the house she was in, made her ready and pleased to hear of anything that might help her out of her difficulties, and she listened to Dorothea's confession more approvingly than Dorothea had dared to hope.

"Oh, yes, we will go," she said in her old sharp way. "I shan't hope for any good to



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come of it, so I shan't be disappointed ; but, anyhow, no one will be able to say I missed a good chance because I wouldn't take the trouble to seize it." And two days later she and Dorothea started off on the last of their house-hunting expeditions. John Jeffreys had offered to meet them with the keys of all the empty cottages in Porth Freath, and Miss Garland had expressed herself as glad to hear it.

" It will save time and trouble to have someone with us who knows the place and the houses, for he will know if there is anything wrong with them, which we might not find out for ourselves till too late. And if I can't get one I like, well, I'll take one I don't like ; for stand any more of this racket and worry I cannot, and will not ! "

And Dorothea had written to her old friend : " Please show us the worst first, and keep the best to the last, and don't say anything about it beforehand. "

It was a lovely September morning when the weary house-hunters made their journey. The sun was still warm, but there was just that touch of autumn in the air which braces up one's body and cheers up one's spirits after long, hot, dusty days. As they passed slowly down the little country line, the air was sweet with the smell of newly-cut corn, and in the

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fields the harvesters were busy. Here and there a tree showed its first tints of gold among the green, and the hedges were festooned with feathery 'traveller's joy.'

Then suddenly the line made a wide curve outward, and in place of golden corn-fields and the soft green of meadows was a stretch of yellow sand and blue-green sea.

"Oh!" gasped Dorothea. "Oh! Aunt Julia, did you ever, ever see anything so lovely? Don't you feel that you *must* live here?"

"One can't live on view, even if there's plenty of it," said Miss Garland, with a decided touch of her old manner. She was nearly as charmed as was Dorothea, but she was really afraid to be too pleased, lest the disappointment should be the greater. Then they drew up in the little station, which seemed to have been placed as close to the beach as possible, so that visitors might get to the sea at the very earliest possible moment. And even before the engine had drawn up, Dorothea's eager, happy eyes had caught sight of her dear, faithful guard standing on the platform waiting for them.

He saw her too. "I know it's my young lady," he said, touching his cap, "though you do seem to have grown nearly a foot, missie, every time I see you!"

"And this is my aunt," said Dorothea, smiling from one to the other.

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John Jeffreys touched his cap again. "Very glad to see you, ma'am, and I hope we'll be able to keep you in Porth Freath now you've once come. Shall we start now?" taking the luncheon-basket from Dorothea's hand. "We've got a good day's work before us. My wife sends her respects, ma'am, and hopes you'll do her the honour of stepping over to our little place to tea. She will be counting on it, ma'am, if you please."

"Thank you very much," said Miss Garland graciously; "I am sure we shall be very thankful for some tea by and by, for if there is one thing more tiring than another, and back-breaking and heart-breaking too, it is tramping over empty houses, feeling most of the time that you wouldn't live in one of them if you were paid to. Dorothea, the man has asked you twice for the tickets. Your wits are wool-gathering, child! Um—so this is the village?"

Such a funny, old-fashioned little village it was too! Compared with it, Blybury was large, busy, and bustling; but Blybury had none of the sunny charm, the airy spaciousness, the feeling of cheerfulness which made Porth Freath the little haven of rest and happiness that it was. Even Miss Garland's spirits rose—as her face showed—while as for Dorothea, she was almost speechless with happiness.

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"This is the first on my list, ma'am," said their pioneer, drawing up before a little house, one of a row. It stood at the end of a strip of ground politely called a garden. The garden was surrounded by palings only; on either side of it children played and quarrelled noisily. Miss Garland looked from the house to the garden, then at the children, and turned away. "This won't do," she said grimly. Then, as Dorothea still hesitated, "Come, child, there is no need to trouble to go over it. I wouldn't live there if the house was given me rent free. Where do we go next, Mr Jeffreys?"

"It is convenient for the station, ma'am," said John, as though determined to say what he could for the place.

"Yes," grimly, "I should think one would be glad to go away by the first train in the morning if one had to live in that house."

"It has a nice bit of garden."

"It has a bit of ground, certainly, but it is not nice, nor is it a garden. I should require a six-foot wall all round it before I would think of living there—but what is the use of wasting time? Come along, Dorothea."

For a few moments they walked on in almost unbroken silence. "One doesn't get much of a choice in small places," said John gravely. "Villages are generally disappointing to town folk. This is the next on the list, ma'am,"

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and he drew up before a little low white house, nice enough in its old-fashioned way, but its front door opened from the street right into the sitting-room.

That did not do either. Neither of the conspirators had thought it would; nor did the next, or the next, though Miss Garland, tired by that time and disappointed, lingered about the last one, half tempted to take it, as nothing better seemed to offer. Indeed, she seemed so much tempted to do so that John Jeffreys thought it was time to say something in its disfavour.

"I think I ought to warn you, ma'am, that it's a bit rough here in the winter. When the weather is wild, and the tide is high, the waves have been known to wash right up over the garden, and——"

"Oh, dear me!" Miss Garland groaned despondently. "Of course, I might have known there would be something wrong with it! It would be too much to hope that we should find a place that would do." And she walked away quickly, with her head in the air. "Come, Dorothea, as we've no fancy for being drowned in our beds, it's no use thinking any more of that. Perhaps we had better have some lunch now. I can't face any more disappointments till I've had some food. You will join us, Mr Jeffreys, I hope? I am afraid we are giving



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you a very trying time," she added apologetically, ashamed of her little outburst. But John Jeffreys only smiled pleasantly. He was used to nervous, worried, peppery people, both men and women.

"Not at all, ma'am, not at all! I'm only sorry I haven't a better lot to show, but of course the best get snapped up first. Thanking you for asking me, ma'am, but I'll go home to my dinner, if you'll excuse me; my wife'll be expecting me. I'll take you first, though, to a nice sheltered spot where you can have your lunch undisturbed, and have a rest before we go on again. There are two more houses on the list. I'm afraid, though, you haven't got much heart for seeing any more!"

He led the way slowly to where a narrow lane led steeply upward. "This leads out on the top of the cliff," he explained; "it's beautiful up there. The grass is short and clean, and there's shelter too, and a view right out to sea. I thought maybe you'd like to eat your lunch there, and I know Missie will."

Like it! They had never in all their lives seen anything so grand, and yet so peaceful.

"And the air!" cried Miss Garland, as they sat in a comfortable nook in the shadow of a big rock; "you can feel it doing you good. I declare I am quite hungry!"

"So am I," sighed Dorothea contentedly, as



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she helped herself to a patty. "Oh, Aunt Julia, wouldn't it be lovely if we could have a cottage just here?"

"In the summer, perhaps, but on the whole I'd rather be a little further down the valley, thank you. It would be too rough up here in the winter to be comfortable."

Dorothea's eyes went wandering anxiously over the valley below. She wondered where Harbour Cottage was, and if it was sheltered enough to suit Miss Julia.

Punctual to the moment their guide appeared. "We are almost sorry to see you," said Miss Garland, with a twinkle in her eye; "it is so beautiful here we don't want to move."

"I expect you are very tired, ma'am."

But Miss Garland was already on her feet. "I don't mind being tired," she said with her old determination, "if I can find a house here. I can bear a little aching of my bones."

"Well, ma'am, it's just possible you may. I'll take you next to a little place called Harbour Cottage."

"The name is all right," interposed Miss Garland hopefully. Dorothea stood gazing out to sea; she felt she could not meet her aunt's eyes, or Mr Jeffreys'.

"It's down at the foot of this same cliff, ma'am, a nice sheltered spot. Then, if that

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doesn't do, there's one other." Picking up the basket, he led them down the steep road again to the spot whence they had branched upward, but this time they took the lower road. There were houses scattered about here, pretty little nicely-kept houses. Miss Garland looked at them longingly, but all were occupied. At the end of the road stood the prettiest and largest of them all, one side facing the road, the front of it looking out over a garden, a long garden, and beyond the garden to the harbour and the sea.

"Oh!" cried Miss Garland with a gasp, and coming to a standstill before the little house. "Now, if we could have that! Oh, Dorothea, look at it, look at the garden; and, oh, actually there is an orchard behind! The orchard does belong to it, doesn't it, Mr Jeffreys?"

"Yes'm; beautiful trees, too; some of them nearly new."

Miss Garland groaned with envy. "Come away, Dorothea; I mustn't look at it, or I shall never fancy any other! I want to buy it and turn out the owners. I expect it is the only way one would ever be likely to get it, isn't it, Mr Jeffreys?" she asked ruefully.

"Well, you see, ma'am," said John quietly, "those that lived here didn't want to leave it, but when folks are ordered away on duty they've got to go, whether they like it or not."

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Miss Garland looked up at him sharply. "Is this the house you were bringing us to?" she asked eagerly, her eyes growing bright with hope. "Is this really to let?"

By way of reply John Jeffreys put aside a large spray of syringa which lay over the top of the open gate, and showed the name, Harbour Cottage, painted across it.

Dorothea had never seen her aunt's face so full of excitement and pleasure as it was at that moment. "Oh!" she cried, as they followed John up the flagged path between a maze of flowers, "it is just perfect, and it feels like ours already. It is home! Though I haven't set foot inside it yet, I feel as though I'd come home—don't you, Dorothea?"

Dorothea stood before the house, her eyes drinking in every detail—the wide, low front that seemed to smile at them, the porch with seats on either side, the deep bay windows opening into the garden, the three large windows above, all facing the sun and the sea. She was almost too happy to speak.

"Oh, Aunt Julia, I love it! It's a darling house, and doesn't it look as if it were welcoming us—as if it were glad we had come? I feel as if it had been waiting for us all the time. We must have it, Aunt Julia, mustn't we?"

"We shouldn't find another I should like so much, not if we searched the world through,"

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said Miss Garland decisively. And Dorothea's heart went out in loving gratitude to the dear Granny who had made it possible for her to give her aunt a pretty home that she could love.

"Perhaps," said John sagely, "you had better go over the house, ma'am, before you make up your mind. You may be disappointed when you see the inside." He was scarcely able to understand the charm which the little place had thrown over Miss Garland; but, then, he had not been house-hunting vainly for weeks, as they had, and men do not feel toward a house as women do. But as Miss Garland went from room to room, and cupboard to cupboard, she only grew more and more delighted, and the sight of the kitchen settled the matter beyond all doubt.

"Then, perhaps, you won't care to inspect the last house on my list, ma'am?" asked John Jeffreys gravely, but with a twinkle in his eye as it met Dorothea's.

Miss Garland shook her head. "You will not get me to look at another," she said decisively. "I should be afraid to move from this for fear the owner would let it to someone else while my back was turned."

John closed his notebook and put it back into his pocket; he was a long time about it. "Well, ma'am," he said, and there was

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embarrassment in his tone which made Dorothea look at him anxiously, "I reckon there won't be any risk of that as long as you and Missie choose to stay. I—um——"

Dorothea stood in front of him, so that he could not avoid meeting her eyes. "Who," she demanded, shaking her finger at him sternly, "who is our landlord?"

In spite of his tan he coloured, and his eyes fell, but not before she had seen the self-conscious look in them. "I do believe," cried Dorothea excitedly, "that the house is yours, and that you are our landlord!"

John looked up then, with a pleased twinkle in his eye. "Well, missie, I did buy the house," he admitted modestly. "I'd got a little money saved, and—and I took a fancy to the place, and——"

"That makes it nicer than ever," cried Miss Garland warmly, and their new landlord bowed.

"I'd always got a hope in my heart that my young lady would live in it some day," he said, with shy enjoyment of this happy moment. "I bought it hoping she would; somehow I seemed to picture her here." And presently, when Miss Garland was absorbed in examining the workings of the kitchen stove, he signed to Dorothea. "Come with me a minute, missie," he said shyly. "I've got something more to

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show you that I think you will like"; and Dorothea, filled with curiosity, followed him through the back door.

The kitchen ran out at the back of the house, like a wing built on to it, and over the kitchen was a large, bright sunny bedroom. She did not notice that now, though; all that she saw was a large rose-bush growing up beside the kitchen window, and reaching almost to the room above—a bush of her own beloved cottage roses. There were no blooms on it then, of course, only the pretty green leaves, but they were enough for Dorothea. She turned to her guard with her face lighted up with joy. "You put it there?—on purpose for me?"

"When I bought the place, missie, the first thing I did was to plant that rose, and I said to myself, says I, if ever a place was built for my young lady, 'twas this one; and if ever my young lady wants a little cottage by the sea, same as she once set her heart on, why, here it shall be waiting for her—rose-bush and all!"

Dorothea looked up at him with happy, grateful eyes, but her lips would tremble. "Oh," she whispered, "how good everyone is to me! What should I have done without you? And if it hadn't been for my journey that day, and my little white roses, I might never have known you—and what should I have done then? Why, I shouldn't have been



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here now!" she added, as though that was something too dreadful to contemplate.

"Oh, you'd have found friends, missie," said her old friend huskily; "you'd have found other friends, and a home somewhere."

"But—but not you and not this——"

"Dorothea, Dorothea," Aunt Julia's voice came echoing through the house, "do come here and look; there is the loveliest great robin walking about the garden!"

"Everything I want seems to be coming to me," thought Dorothea as she hurried round to see.

Presently four loud strokes rang out from the church tower, and three happy people started with surprise. "*Four!*" they cried with one breath. "Already!"

"And my missus told me the apple pasty would be ready to come out of the oven by four, and tea'd be on the table," cried John, with a face of dismay. "Will it be convenient for you to come, ma'am, at once?"

"Convenient!" groaned Miss Garland. "If I don't go soon I shall never go at all. I am so tired! I never wanted a cup of tea so badly in all my life, or a chair either."

But still they were reluctant to leave, and many a backward glance was thrown until Harbour Cottage was really out of sight.

"I never dreamed," said Dorothea that

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night, as they journeyed back to Blybury, "I never dreamed that we should find so sweet a house, and by the sea too! Doesn't it seem too good to be true, Aunt Julia?"

"It does to me," said Miss Julia wistfully; "but won't you miss your big house, dear, and the horses and carriages, and all the luxuries you have had these last few years?"

But Dorothea only tucked her hand through her aunt's arm. "I don't want anything but to live in Harbour Cottage with you, Aunt Julia"; and Miss Julia, though listening keenly, could hear no note of faltering in her voice.

"There is one thing I want," said Dorothea presently, "just one thing, and that will make everything perfect. When we send for my things from Yabsley, and the pony, I shall ask the old gardener to send me a cutting of my own white rose, and we will take a cutting from yours, Aunt Julia, and we will plant one on either side of the porch at the cottage, won't we? And then by and by they will grow up and grow in together, until we shall not know one from the other! Won't it be lovely, Aunt Julia?"

"Lovely!" said Aunt Julia softly; but in her heart she felt that the sweetest rose of all would be within the cottage—the sweet white rose grown from both the houses. And

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from her heart there passed out all the old bitterness and hatred ; and all that was left was sorrow for the pride and unforgiveness that had wrecked so many lives, and overshadowed so many more.

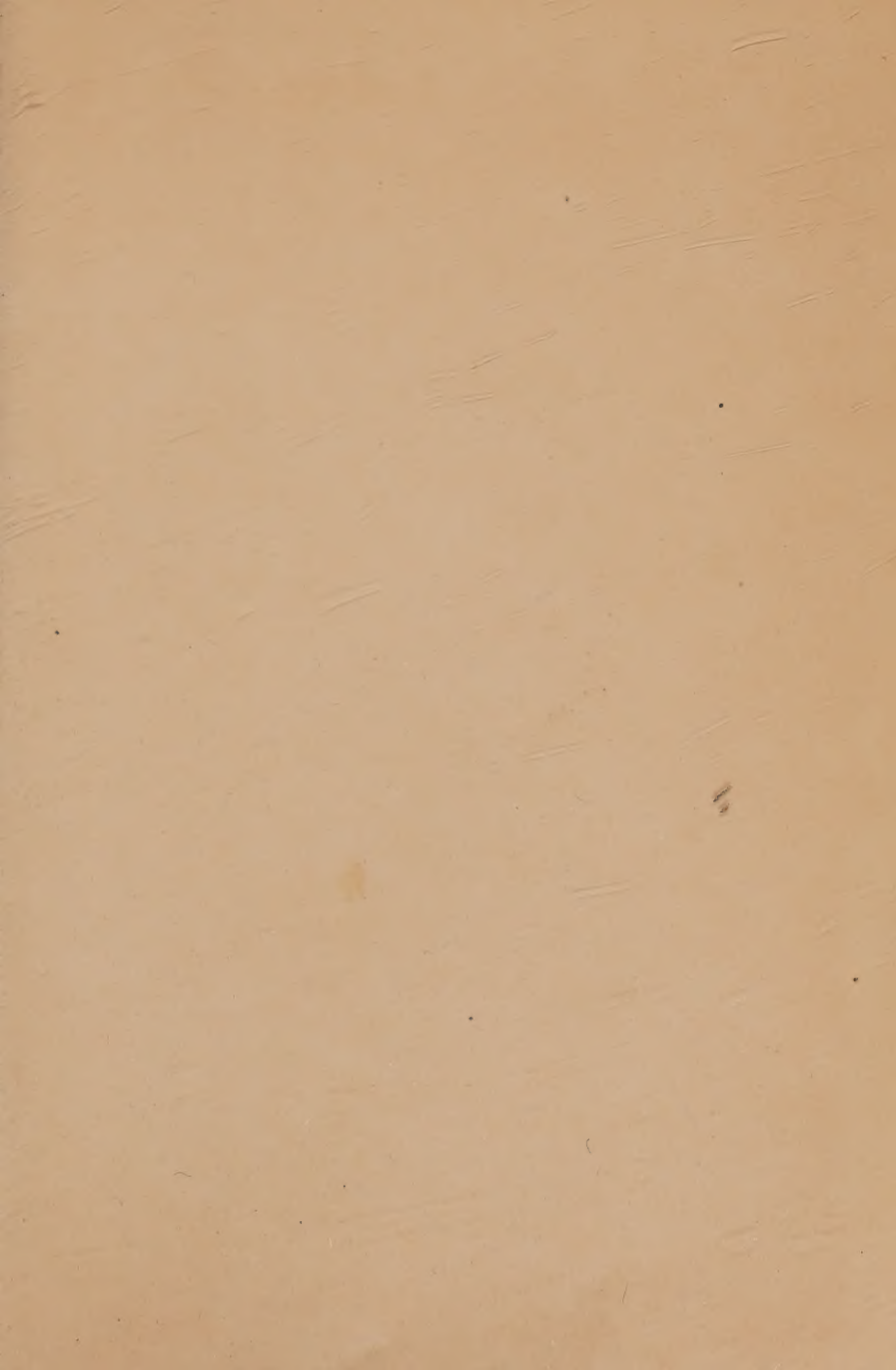


















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